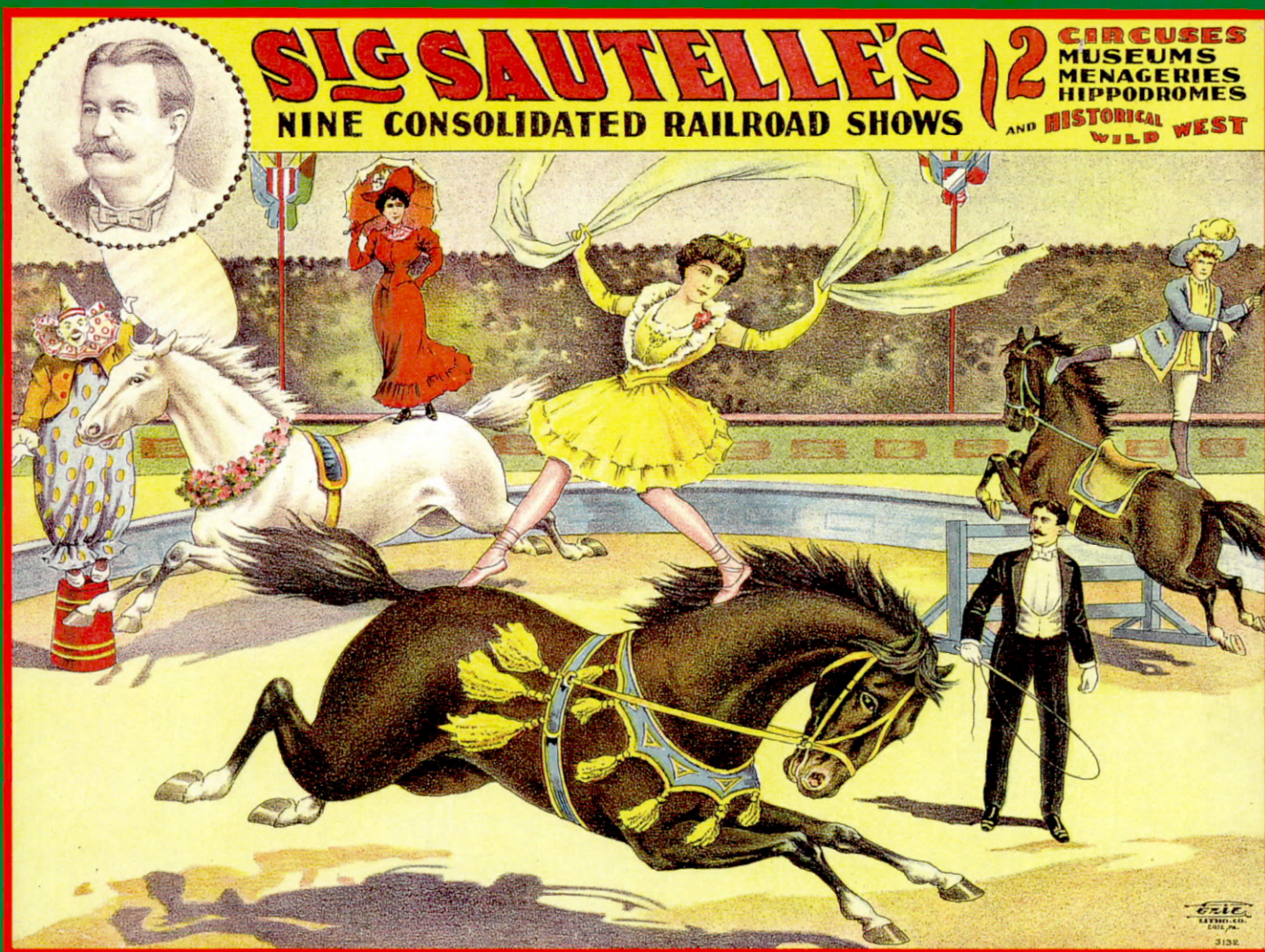


Bandwagon

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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BANDWAGON

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Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor

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THE FRONT COVER

The Sig Sautelle images on the front and back covers and on page 3 were used in 1911. They are 10 1/4" x 14" window cards. The same designs probably appeared on half and one sheet lithographs.

They were printed by the Erie Litho Co. and are from the Pfening Archives.

ARTICLES INVITED

In recent years there has been a fall off in submissions to *Bandwagon*. Readers are invited and encouraged to send articles on their research interests to the Editor. Both historical and current topics are welcome. Papers based on original research have been the back bone of *Bandwagon* for decades, and it is to the benefit of the CHS that it continue.

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I certify the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (Signed) Fred D. Pfening



Robert Scott MacDougall
1935-2008

Bob MacDougall saw his first circus at one month old in May 1935 in the Boston Garden. He was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, about twenty-five miles from Boston. The first show he remembered was the 1943 Ringling show in the Boston Garden.

The layout in the Garden had the menagerie and side show in another building, also on the third level. He started photographing the circus in 1948. As a teenager he recalled being taken to see Russell Bros., a truck show.

Many years later he realized that he had missed some important elements of the Big Show. He did not see the Ringling show under canvas until 1953.

The circus became a life long interest.

His early professional career was in engineering design in California. His hobby was model circus building. As a true craftsman his model construction was outstanding. He became acquainted with other model builders and maintained contact with them throughout his life.

He decided he wanted to join the circus professionally. He and his wife Pauline joined Ringling-Barnum in Venice, Florida in December 1973. His first job was wardrobe department boss.

His talents were quickly recognized by show officials and he began his climb through the ranks to become a unit general manager.

In 1978 he was assistant general manager of the Blue unit and became manager in 1979. He continued as general manager of the Blue and Red units into the 1980s.

He was a principal equipment designer of the containerized Gold unit that went to Japan in 1988. In 1989 MacDougall was in charge of the Venice winter quarters and the train recycling operation. He remained a consultant to the Ringling organization for a number of years.

Bob designed many innovations in Ringling-Barnum show equipment, including performing animal cage wagons that folded out as exercise verandas, a transport wagon for moving Flavio Togni's white rhino into the arena, sleepers with vestibules and doors in the middle so that each could have four private sections, pool wagons for sea lions and container cars for hauling concessions that had earlier been stored in the pot bellies beneath the sleepers.

Robert Scott MacDougall died on October 20, 2008. Fred D. Pfening, Jr., with help from Richard J. Reynolds, Fred Dahlinger, Dom Yodice and Erin Foley.

Sig Sautelle

New York Circus Owner

By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

George C. Satterlee was born in Luzerne, New York on September 22, 1850. With the coming of the Civil War he enlisted in the 18th New York Volunteer Infantry in 1862. At such a young age he was assigned as a drummer boy. He was discharged at the end of the war in 1865.

Following his discharge Satterlee worked for several years around Saratoga, Glens Falls and Fort Edward, New York. After the war he learned the wagon building trade. However, he yearned to travel. When he heard of the Great North American Circus, he went to their winter quarters in Connecticut to find employment and thus began his life-long career as a showman.

He worked in side shows as a magician and ventriloquist. Satterlee envisioned himself as a great Italian circus performer and changed his name to Signor Sautelle.

In 1875 he married Ida Belle Travers, of Fort Edwards, New York. She was a capable woman and became his invaluable business partner.

In 1875 Mr. and Mrs. Sautelle started out with a Punch and Judy show. They later joined various shows, doing a juggling act and

The Sautelle ticket wagon in 1900. Pfening Archives.

adding ventriloquism to their list of accomplishments while with the Forepaugh show.

By 1880 he operated Sautelle's Big Show after buying two old canal boats to frame a canal boat circus. He ordered thirty-four small wagons from the A. J. Murray Wagon Works in Syracuse. He named one of the boats

The Belle of Fort Edwards in honor of his wife. The other boat was named *The Kitty*. The first boat was fitted out to carry the troupe. The other carried the menagerie, canvas, pole wagon, the cook house and horses.

Sig's boat show traveled New York State via the Erie, Chemung, Seneca and Champaign canals. He operated the boat show for seven years. During the winter Sautelle froze his boats in the canal at Syracuse and turned them into beer saloons.

In 1892 he moved to DeRuyter, New York where he bought the Hotel Windsor and established a winter quarters. His show then consisted of



40 wagons and 140 horses. By 1900 he felt the folks in DeRuyter were not progressive and moved his winter quarters to Homer, New York.

Window card used in 1911.

In 1902 he constructed a large octagonal training ring which later became his home. The three story 55-foot octagon build-

ing was constructed to look like a circus tent. It had five large bedrooms, each with a closet on the second floor. The first floor had five large rooms and three smaller rooms. Sautelle's pride was the big horse ring made of crust diamonds, which he wore on his shirtfront. In the ticket wagon he carried a mattress and every afternoon on warm days he would spread it out in the marquee just as the doors opened and take a nap.

In 1895 Sautelle bought a good sized canvas and joined with a man

Bandwagon used around 1900.





The building in Homer, New York.

named Schreibner who owned some performing horses. This partnership



The Sautelle advance car around 1903.

and circus were not successes, and Sautelle found himself in debt. Frank Matty and Doc Henderson backed

A Sautelle & Welsh bill stand in 1904.



him in a side show at the Onondaga fair. The following year Sautelle had a contract with Irwin brothers which also ended in disagreement.

In 1896 the show played Ithaca, New York on September 5. The show was billed as Sig Sautelle's New Big Shows, Circus, Museum and Trained Animals, the Largest and Best 25 cent Entertainment on Earth.

Frank Farrell played alto sax in the side show band in 1897. Tom

Henchy played a baritone in the big show. Henchy was a barber by trade in the winter and trouped with Sautelle during the summer. Henchy opened up his barber shop in the side show tent until time for parade, which left the show grounds at noon, Sautelle was usually one of his first customers each morning.

Tom Finn was the side show manager, and did magic and Punch and Judy. It was here that Farrell learned to perform a ventriloquism act.

Farrell told a this story about Sautelle, "When Sautelle went into the dining tent and eggs were being served Sig would call back to the cook and say 'give them all the eggs they want' and hold up one finger,



Program issued in 1911.

meaning give them one egg. People who never trouped with the show claimed that it was a fact and would get a little peeved about it. I told them that it was not so and explained to them that it was just one of Sautelle's jokes."

Farrell stated that Sautelle always had a good cook house and served everything in season.

At the close of the 1901 season, Sautelle and Frank A. Robbins went over railroad show plans for the next year. The show had fifteen 60-foot cars. It had a big top and a wild animal menagerie containing fourteen cages and four elephants. The show was titled the Great Sautelle Circus.

Sautelle always had a fine show in those days featuring riders such as Charles and Jennie Ewers, and Captain Pierre, a four horse rider

A Sautelle lot scene in 1911.



A SELECTION OF SAUTELLE LETTERHEADS



A cage on the Sautelle-Welsh Bros. Circus.

and high diver. Pierre made a high dive from an 80-foot ladder on the midway as a free act immediately after the parade and again in the evening at seven o'clock. The big show band had twelve musicians.

The performers, musicians, ticket sellers and officials slept and ate breakfast in hotels and lunch and supper on the lot.

The bandwagons used four horses in the parade. Two carryalls carried the performers. A newspaper in Washington, New Jersey reviewed the show, "Sautelle's circus was in town yesterday and was without a doubt, the best one ring show ever exhibiting in this locality. The street parade at noon was unusually good and was well attended. The street concert at night was also of a high order. The show was liberally patronized and each and every act merited the applause it received."

The 1902 season closed Glassboro, New Jersey at the end of November. The December 13 *Billboard* noted, "One new sleeper, one new stock car and one new flat will be added to the train next year making an eighteen car show. New animals, including ten elephants are expected to arrive January 10."

The 1903 route book commented that the Sautelle show played Fitchburg, Massachusetts on June 30 and Gardner, Massachusetts on July 1 where the day was one of rain and high winds. The big top, horse tent and side show were blown down right after the parade. The afternoon performance was lost, but the night show was good.

In 1904 Sautelle published a weekly four page paper for circus people. It was titled *The Tent City News*. The staff included Sig Sautelle, editor in chief and Frank A. Robbins, managing editor.

A 1904 *Billboard* reported: "The Sig Sautelle Railroad Shows have added a six ton elephant, a leopard and have placed an order for two zebras and four elephants. Stock cars are of all of uniform height, width and length, as are the flats. and each is painted a bright yellow and lettered in black and red. There are four Pullmans. There are more babies than is to be found with any other show, including two Shetland colts, two lions cubs, an infant kangaroo, several young monkeys, a pair of little spiral-horned antelopes and Baby Bell, one of the smallest elephants in America."

(Season of 1913.)
Home of Bensons Wild Animal Farm.
NASHUA, FRIDAY, MAY 23 AFTERNOON AND EVENING
SHOW GROUNDS KINSLEY STREET CIRCUS GROUNDS

SIG. SAUTELLE'S
NINE BIG SHOWS
CIRCUS MUSEUM MENAGERIE
REMEMBER THE DAY AND DATE

TENFOLD MORE FOR THE MONEY
THAN ANY OTHER SHOW ON EARTH.
A REALIZATION OF THE CIRCUS
THE MOST EMINENT THE EARTH HAS KNOWN IN ANY CENTURY.
A Multitudinous Overwhelming Indescribable crush of Amazing Gymnastic, Acrobatic, Spectacular, Aerial and Equestrian SENSATIONS.

A 1913 Sautelle newspaper ad.

The end of the 1904 season Sautelle sold his circus to Joseph McCaddon who took the show to France for the 1905 season.

Sautelle got an idea he wanted to play new territory and had his eye on Pennsylvania. He feared opposition from the Welsh Bros.' show. So he made Mike and John Welsh a proposition and his show went out in the spring as the Sautelle-Welsh Bros. Combined Shows.

The Sautelle and Welsh Bros. Show's 1905 season was a short one. It opened in Rochester, Pennsylvania on September 6 and closed in Quarryville, Pennsylvania after playing in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio and Maryland. The Sautelle-Welsh operation lasted two years.

Sig was never cut out to have partners. He dissolved the partnership and went out with his own show over his old territory. He signed Frank A. Robbins as his general agent. Robbins took the show through New Jersey.

In 1911 the show was titled Sig Sautelle's 9 Big Shows. Sautelle's partners were Oscar Lowande and George Rollins.

The 1911 performance was typical of Sautelle's over the years, using two rings and a stage.

Display 1, Fred Dares, flying perch; Frank Coyle, Roman Rings; and the Two Fausts, Flying perch.

Display 2, Oscar Lowande, ponies; clowns and John Corries, ponies.

Display 3, Louise Cannon, vaulting hurdle; and John Haggerty, vaulting hurdle.

Display 4, Dares & Ledoux, comedy acrobats; and LaBelle Troupe, trampoline.

Display 5, Dallie Julian, principal riding; and Mamie Lowande, principal riding.

Display 6, Riding dogs in two rings.

Display 7, Two Fausts, double trapeze; and Silverlake, flying trapeze.

Display 8, Cannon & Corriea, three horse carrying act; and the Ledgetts, carrying act and jockey riding.

Display 9, Coyle and Silverlake, contortionists; and Enos & Lawton, contortionists.

Display 10, Ernest Ledoux, high school horse; and Fred Ledgett, high school horse.

Display 11, Oscar Lowande, principal horse somersaulting act; and John Corriea, principal horse somersaulting act.

Display 12, John Haggerty comedy mule act; and Ern, comedy mule act.

Display 13, Clowns.

Display 14, Lowande's Tally-Ho.

Display 15, Elephants.

Display 16, Six different hippodrome races.

The Lowandes and Fred Leggett and his wife Dallie Julian were well known riders.

The 1911 season closed on October 9 at Afton, New York after a 22 week

tour. The October 28 *Billboard* noted, "The Sautelle show is one of the largest wagon shows on the road carrying 112 horses, 16 cages of animals, two elephants and two camels. There were 16 men in the big show band; 10 people in the side show."

The June 1, 1912 *Billboard* noted, "The Sig Sautelle Shows opened at Homer, New York on May 10. Featured acts included Oscar Lowande, rider; Mamie Lowande, rider; John Corriea, trapeze; Winsome Winnie, butterfly swing; John Haggerty and his mule; Bess Limnous, balancing trapeze."

The January 4, 1913 *Billboard* reported, "The Sig Sautelle Shows will have 130-foot big top with three 50-foot middles; the side show will be a 60 with two middles. The menagerie will be enlarged to twenty cages. There will be three bands in the parade, with a chime organ and a calliope and 200 horses, a massive tableau and mounted people. Every sheet of paper will be special. Twenty men will be on the advance in one car and a box brigade."

The May 24, 1913 *Billboard* noted, "The Sig Sautelle Shows are now in their third week. Twenty-two cars are required to move the show, outside the advance. General Agent Rutherford has a force of twenty men on the advance car and 10 men on the box brigade. The show is using two rings and an elevated stage."

Sautelle's name was associated with a number of other showmen over the years. In 1913 he was co-owner of Sig Sautelle's Nine Big Railroad Shows. This perhaps the largest circus he was associated with. Oscar Lowande was a co-owner and equestrian director and George W. Rollins was a co-owner and side show manager. Bert Rutherford was general agent.

The circus traveled on 24 cars, two on the advance. The big top was a 130 with three 50-foot middles. The side show was a 60-foot round top with four 28-foot middles. The menagerie was an 80 with three 40s.

The menagerie contained 8 elephants, 6 camels, 2 zebras, a water buffalo, 15 cages containing 10 lions, 4 leopards, 2 jaguars, 2 pumas, 2 cougars, 4 hyenas, 1 tiger, 5 polar bears, 3 black bears, 2 antelopes, 14



A Sautelle side show bannerline.

monkeys and 18 birds.

The season made money and was the longest ever for Sautelle. The matinee was lost in Medford, Massachusetts on July 3 because of a small wreck that derailed two flats and a stock car.

In 1914 Sautelle was the sole owner. The train consisted of 20 cars, 2 advance, 8 flats, 5 stocks and 5 sleepers. There were 63 head of baggage stock.

The May 16, 1914 *Billboard* stated, "The Sautelle performance was Display 1 Clown song by Lewis Nichols, pony act and Three Daltons, bicycle act. 2 Louise Cannon and Ouka Meers, principal riders; 3 Clown number; 4 Harry Bennett, ménage act; 5 Clown number; 6 The Casting Fords; 7 Gothard Trio and the Ernest Troupe, tight wire; 8 Ernest La Doe, mule act; 9 Clown number; 10 Rollin's elephants in rings one and three; 11 Ladder, perch and double trapeze; 12 Lew Nichols and Danny Ryan, clowns; 13 John Corriea and Oscar Lowanda, principal riders; 14 Cavanaugh and Wheelers, acrobats; 15 Clowns; 16 T. Ford and Flying Cowdens, double traps and 17 The Tally-ho with the eight Lowandas. Races concluded the program.

George Rollins was the side show manager. The acts included, Prof. Rouse's fifteen piece colored band; Arthur Allen, fire eater and snakes; Mme. Aimes, fat girl; Pete Moore, illusions; May Fiske, magic; and May Lloyd dancing girl.

On August 1 the circus was sold to Louis Thilman. Thilman added his private car to the train.

The show closed in Litchfield, Kentucky. The United States Lithographing Company closed on

the show to assume the printing bill. The circus property was moved to Lawrenceburg, Indiana.

After the close William P. Hall purchased 12 cars, 11 cages of animals and 5 elephants. Because of a clause in the original sale the 63 head of stock were returned to the Sautelle's quarters. One car was accidentally burned while the property was in Lawrenceburg.



Clifton Sparks and Sig Sautelle in 1925.

With his wife in failing health he sold part of his show to Danny Robinson. Sautelle's luck finally ran out. Unable to pay his property taxes and having extensive debts due to his wife's medical expenses he declared bankruptcy in December 1914. His assets were \$3815 and his liabilities totaled \$33,102.

But that was not the last of Sautelle's circus activity. He and his new partner George A. Manchester

organized a motorized circus in 1917.

The May 5, 1917 *Billboard* reported, "Compton, Rhode Island, April 27, Buzzing with life and activity the winter quarters of Sautelle & Lowande Monster Motor Truck Circus presents an animated scene. Money has been liberally spent by management, and as a result, a big show of new and up-to-date novelties will take the road. Wild animals are arriving daily."

The August 11, 1917 *Billboard* reported, "The Sautelle & Lowande Shows are now in their twelfth week of topnotch business, filling at almost every performance.

"The first accident of the season happened the early part of July when one of the ring stock was hit by an automobile and killed."

The March 9, 1918 *Billboard* stated, "The old reliable Sig Sautelle Show will take the road May 11 and will be transported on its own motor trucks. After carefully looking over the motor truck field manager George A. Manchester has placed an order for a train of three-and-a-half-ton trucks to be delivered the first week of April. A contract has also been placed with the Arctic Cabinet Company to construct the bodies for the trucks."

The August 3, 1918 *Billboard* noted, "The Sig Sautelle Show has been enjoying very good business since the opening at Newport, Rhode Island in May. The show is transported overland by trucks, and so far has not missed a stand this season. The roster includes Sig Sautelle and George A. Manchester, owners."

Sautelle retired to his home in Homer, and since then took a couple of flings back into the game, but to quote him, "Never, seriously." Sig disposed of much of his real estate holdings. He took much interest in filling dates throughout the East with his Humpty Dumpty Circus during times when he could move about in his large touring car. In Homer he owned and operated a tavern.

Sig Sautelle died on June 21, 1928 in Glens Falls, New York, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Newman Peabody. Sautelle had lived with the Peabodys, going to Florida each winter.

HIGHBALLING ON THE MOONLIGHT LADY

BY RHETT COATES

This article was written in 1990.

The legacy and tradition of the railroad circus was largely ignored by the media when in 1956 the Greatest Show on Earth quit playing under canvas. But dynamic entertainment promoters Irvin and brother Israel Feld, who successfully promoted such big names Fats Domino, Buddy Holly and the Rolling Stones on their first American tour, among others, saw enormous possibilities, and immediately negotiated a contract with circus producer John Ringling North to move the show into indoor arenas.

Once traveling in four railroad sections, some seasons totaling a hundred cars or more, the proud Big Show had become strained and tired, "a victim of the times" so it was put. A low point came when the show was moved by trucks for a few seasons in the late 1950s, but the Felds had something else in mind.

The Big Show returned to rails in the early 1960s, moving on fewer than twenty cars, but a new trend had begun. In 1969 things took off when the Felds, newly in control of the show, created a second touring railroad circus, doubling the size and scope of the production. The original show was termed the Red Unit, the newer show the Blue Unit, and as of 1987, each unit had become a 44-car railroad show. Railroads had been found to be much more cost effective and reliable than trucks. They still are.

The Red Unit takes all odd-numbered editions of the show on a two-year circuit beginning each odd-numbered year. The Blue Unit takes all even-numbered editions on the same two year circuit, beginning each even-numbered year. A city will see successive editions of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus

each year, unless a schedule change occurs.

As the show grew, transportation needs grew also. In the early 1970s a large fleet of Union Pacific passenger cars was moved to the show's winter quarters in Venice, Florida, where they were stripped of their interiors and re-built as sleepers and dorm cars, year round housing for circus personnel on tour. Cars from other companies were purchased as well, including Amtrak and Auto Train.

At the beginning of 1987, the circus, now produced by Kenneth Feld, son of the late Irvin Feld, owned 120 rail cars.

Of these, thirty two cars in Venice, Florida were in process or planned to be recycled, used as shop facilities or awaited disposition, possibly some up for sale. Eighty eight cars were, and still are, on the road.

With only a few exceptions in Venice, all cars are painted bright silver and sport huge red and white side banners reading "Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus." These highly visible markings are actually six-piece stickers manufactured by the 3M Company, and are centered on each coach (circus term for all passenger carrying cars, including sleepers) below the windows. Before the Felds took control of the show, the coaches had the show name in small lettering in a red stripe above

the windows, much like the paint scheme on current Southern Pacific passenger equipment. The newer design attracts much attention, turning all heads as the train rolls through neighborhoods en route.

"Globe logos" which are the show's famous trademark reading "The Greatest Show on Earth" are also stickers made by the 3M Company. The "ocean" backgrounds for these are red on Red Unit's train and blue on Blue Unit's train; spray stenciled reporting marks on either train are color coded similarly. These are the easiest ways to distinguish between the trains as they roll by, also Red Unit's number series as of 1987 cars 16 through 28 and 30 through 60; Blue Unit's series as of 1987 was 74 through 112 and 129 through 133. The two units, equal in size in both train and production, pass each other on rare occasions.

These two trains and the carnival train of James E. Strates Shows are the last of the "great American railroad shows," survivors from a time when big amusement productions of this nature went on rails. Times changed, and many circuses failed or merged with others to survive. Some of these became part of the Big Show, such as Sells-Floto, which runs the concessions and food service on the current Ringling-Barnum units.

A frequently asked question is why the show still uses trains rather than

Tunnel cars.



trucks to move. In addition to reasons mentioned earlier, the cost of putting up 350 people per circus unit in hotels every night is far greater than having them live aboard rail cars, and saves money and red tape where highway permits are concerned.

"It's actually a house train," says Jim Caldwell, in charge of Red Unit's men's wardrobe department, and a former vice president of Circus Fans Association. "It's a passenger train with freight cars on the rear."

He continues: "The whole show is on the train, the people, the animals, equipment; everything. It's a rolling hotel." About 350 people live on the coaches in rooms ranging in size from bunks to staterooms. Others opt to travel and live in their own vehicles, but not many can afford to do that during the 11 months a year the shows are on the road, moving 12,000 to 15,000 miles.

Train Consist Lineup

The number of locomotives hauling either train depends on the line's ruling grade, train tonnage and other factors. Because of their weight, the four stock cars carrying elephants, horses and other circus animals are located directly behind the engines. Following these are usually the coaches, and on the rear the equipment cars consisting of 90-foot piggyback flats, a "kitbashed" bi-level and perhaps a tunnel car, a former baggage car with removable ends resembling a tunnel. Stretching nearly a mile, each circus train makes quite a sight.

This "normal lineup" isn't always the norm. Cabooseless operation of trains by the railroads is affecting the circus train consist, as the bi-level, and tunnel cars which carry the big cats may sometimes be seen near the head end with the stock cars, in order that circus personnel can keep their eyes on the animals if no one is riding the rear. In another unusual lineup, the Red Unit moved from Fort Worth to Dallas in the pre-dawn hours of July 25, 1988 with this lineup: Two Union Pacific units; shop car 34; coaches 60 through 36; container flat 35; flat cars; four stock cars; bi-level and tunnel cars; flat cars; (no



Container car used for concessions storage. Richard Reynolds photo.

caboose). This was due to the unloading arrangement that morning in Dallas.

Factors Affecting Circus Operation

Railroads' practice of taking up or abandoning track is a sure-fire threat to the survival of the railroad circus. Already this practice has necessitated the train being parked miles away from the building in which the show plays because of lack of space enough to store all the cars where service and delivery vehicles can adequately move about.

CSX tracks on which the Red and Blue Units had been stored near Union Station for the Washington, D.C. engagements were found to be badly deteriorated, so the Red Unit was stored on Norfolk Southern tracks in Alexandria, Virginia in 1988, nearly 20 miles south of the D.C. Armory where the show played.

In 1987 circus promoter Greg Ericson discovered that the tracks in Austin, Texas, where the show usually stored its train, were paved over. The Blue Unit had to find another location to warehouse its cars during the engagement. It has been said by some circus officials that if this practice continues, many American cities will simply have to be cut from the tour. It is no light matter. This extremely serious problem for the last three railroad shows, if not stopped or reversed, could mean the true end of the productions as they now exist. The situation in Austin was brought to the promoter's attention only three days before the show was to arrive and he was told the train would have to be stored in

Taylor, Texas, nearly 30 miles north of Austin! For these reasons Ringling depends on the nation's railroads for its very survival as the huge three ring show it is. It was the railroad itself that helped create the three ring circus during the period following the Civil War, as more equipment and personnel were moved quickly and economically over greater distances. As for

now, the Big Show is barely holding on.

Another factor affecting operation of the circus train is the nature of the consist makeup itself: it is a mixed train consisting of both passenger and freight cars. Passenger equipment air brakes operate at 110 psi running back through the train line, at the control lever in the engineer's hand. Freight cars operate at 90 psi, meaning that the consist's brakes operate at different air pressures, rare on today's railroads. On a Red Unit run in mid 1988, an engineer, unaware that 90 psi is the maximum pressure allowed for freight cars, filled the train line with 110 psi, blowing the system and causing a long and unnecessary delay.

Many engineers are inexperienced in handling a passenger train, as they use only the engine brakes when switching the occupied cars, resulting in quite a lot of slack action slamming in and out of the long train's couplers. Train handling of this type frequently causes damage even to items secured for movement, and occasional severe jolts may bring down heavier objects or cause personal injury.

By contrast, some carriers give the circus trains expert handling. Notably among these are Amtrak in the Northeast corridor en route to New York City and the Santa Fe. A saying from the tent show days went something like, "We can relax now. We're on the Santa Fe." This might still be heard today when the show moves on their tracks.

The high purchase price and maintenance requirements make it impractical for the show to own its locomotives. Instead, individual carriers haul the show trains around the nation. Payment to the carriers may

be very similar to rates (and conditions) charged to groups which sponsor excursions. While circus policy generally prohibits disclosure of financial information, some of the costs associated with the train have escaped from the accounting department. The following is an example of what it costs to move a 44-car circus train.

On December 1, 1987, the Red Unit was en route to Nashville from Des Moines, which carried it on to St. Louis and on SBD the rest of the way. From the East St. Louis yard, SBT (Q9X Transportation) charged the show \$14,643 to move to Nashville via Evansville, Kentucky, a total of 323 mile. Payments and contracts are worked out in advance by the show's executives in Washington, D.C., as are all advance arrangements throughout the entire operation. The pros and cons of operating a railroad circus now becomes a real-life board game, like Monopoly, with the outcome directly affected by mergers, line sales, rate changes, track removal or deterioration, and so on.

During A Jump

Circus people call the move to the next to town a jump. Before each jump begins, the circus trainmaster, via a loaned radio to the engineer which is tuned to the show frequency, will convey information and correspondence, keeping in touch en route in the event of an unscheduled operational changes. It is perhaps the train itself that generates the "family" feeling of the circus, for it is here that the old caste system of days gone by has largely been forgotten. On the jumps the main walk-through section becomes a busy artery, linking all the neighborhood homes, and visiting your next car neighbor is the normal routine. People from a variety of departments will regularly congregate in the vestibules to socialize and watch the scenery roll by. The public would never know that who they saw riding the train might be an aerialist, vendor, clown, dancer, pooper scooper, or animal trainer.

While insurance policies prohibit the occupancy of vestibules on Amtrak and excursion trains, the circus train has no such rule.



A generator car.

Employees are expected to use common sense and caution when in these locations. In fact, vestibule riding is very much encouraged. Some employees will stand for hours on end watching passing scenery from a vestibule. Others prefer to sleep during the entire jump, waking only to eat meals or watch television. For others, a jump means time to party hardy. The smartest ones relax so that a jump becomes a short vacation, as the only company vacation now is a two-week break in Louisville, at mid-season on the show's "Rodeo Route" tour.

The show is totally subject to railroad regulations during jumps, which means circus people frequently find themselves stopped in the middle of nowhere waiting for a priority train to pass, track gangs to clear out of the way, or for distant dispatchers to give their "Private Varnish" clearance, a regular occurrence. Upon arrival at the next town, it's left up to the individual to find a laundry, grocery store, post office, movie theatre, restaurant and so on, if in fact these services are even located anywhere near the train at all! In towns where the train is spotted away from such places this can be next to impossible, as transportation for most is the circus train alone.

The Pie Car

Long distance Amtrak trains have a dining car; circus trains have a pie car. As of 1988, the Blue Unit's Pie Car was numbered RBX 80. The Red Unit's was numbered RBX 42. The show's concessions department, Sells-Floto, runs the Pie Car, employing a manager and up to five cooks. On a rotation basis, these six people operate the service on either train, as well as the Pie Car Junior, the food-

service wagon the show uses at the arena. All food is served at cost to show employees.

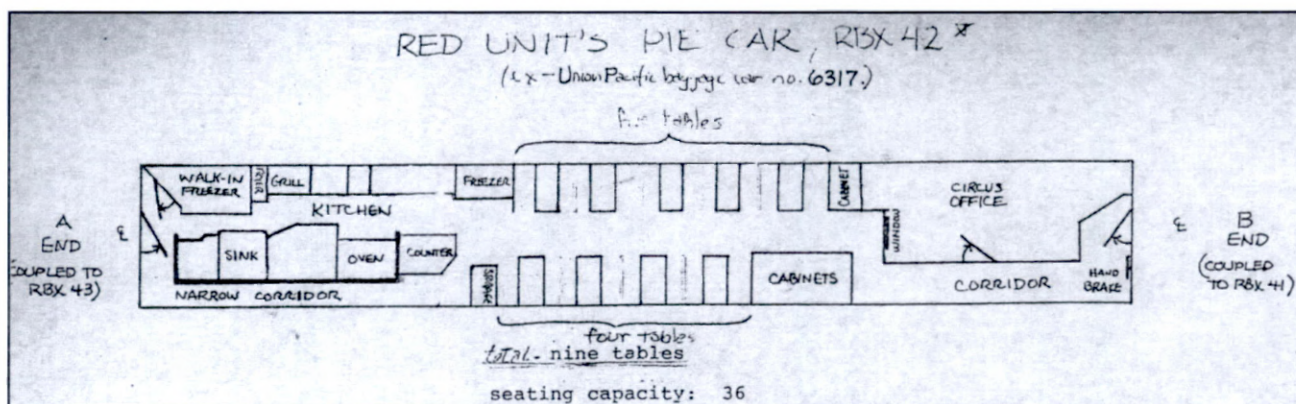
The Pie Car is open from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. to midnight (or 1 hour after the final bus run from the arena) on normal days, and is open around the clock during a jump. Seating capacity on PBX 42 is 36 people at nine tables; however, due to a lack of storage space, at least one table is always occupied with supplies for which no storage room exists. Every space conceivable is used for storage—even under the seats. Simply lift a cushion.

The interior is interesting inasmuch as major appliances were installed through one of the original car's baggage doors, and afterward the door was sealed shut. There are no facilities for keeping ice, and drinking water is not served; however, the car has just about everything else required for cooking needs.

Many residents' rooms are equipped with stoves or hot plates, yet some still go to the Pie Car to eat and socialize, the heaviest rush being in late evening after the day's final performance. If the cooking staff is short-handed, delays in service may be encountered, usually when everyone is in a hurry such as on the morning of a set-up day.

Because of the innate dangers of hot, sloshing grease, the fryer is not used during jumps, assuring a cook's safety when inexperienced engineers handle the train roughly, a fact of circus life that is worse on some railroads than others.

The name Pie Car seems to have no clear cut origin. This author has heard several explanations. I will refrain from listing them all here, save two likely possibilities. First, the name could have come from what was once called the Privilege Car, a place on the train where only certain privileged individuals and employees



(i.e. management and stars) were allowed, hence the initials P.I.E. Second, the term may simply refer pie, which was served during the days the show was under canvas.

In actual practice today, the Pie Car is open to anyone on the show, and no one really cares much about where the name came from. It's simply where they go to eat. The main course each evening at the train is known as Mainline, and is usually quite good. For cash-short workmen who want to eat, the show will issue a circus food-stamp booklet called a "Dukie Book," worth \$10, an advance on his next paycheck. However, sometimes new workmen unfamiliar with how this operates will sign out too many books, ending up with more advance than his entire paycheck! On such rare occasions the paymaster and Pie Car manager will stop issuing Dukie Books to the unlucky fellow until he catches up in his pay. Fortunately, this does not happen very often, and others will help out until he can regain monetary solidity.

Water

Circus employees, for the most part, do precisely the same job every day all season long. But the train crewman responsible for watering the coaches has options. "That's one thing I can do [others] can't," says Red Unit's Waterman, Paul Eroo, a retired steel worker and life-time rail fan. "When I'm bored I can change my routine," he says, referring to the choice of which cars he'll fill first.

Using a continuous pipeline through the length of the coaches, joined from car to car with Chicago fittings, water tanks of various sizes under each car are filled in a process which can take anywhere from four

Drawing of the pie car by author.

to seven hours on normal days, to nearly ten hours on tear-down day when tanks are topped off for a jump. "There's no such thing as a [specific] time. Every town's different, depending on the size of hose used, pressure in [the local] hydrants, where the water enters the train, if pumps are used, etc."

Water can be run through the entire train from one end. The coaches can also be filled from anywhere in the cuts of coaches, depending on how the cars are split up in certain towns. "It's always different," says the Waterman, as he opens a valve under one car, allowing a tank to begin filling up. "Certain cars will give the most problems, others are easy. Problems, seem to occur when you least expect it around here; that's normal for the circus, though."

Situations causing trouble include flooding inside or out, air bubbles in the waterline, and expanding air in holding tanks caused by hot weather. In cold weather the waterline may freeze up, requiring a blowing out of the system by compressed air. The show carries a compressed air machine for such purposes, as well as for testing the train line airbrakes.

When the train arrives in a city, porters lay out and hook up various sizes of fire hoses and adapters to a local fire

hydrant near the siding. Again, pre-arrangements have been made for this by the Washington office. In some towns a meter is placed out to assure accurate readings for cost control.

Because of the Chicago fitting configuration of the waterline, water may be pumped in from any location desired. "If you're hooked up to a continuous source of water like 'back home' then you're all right," says Eroo. "But the circus train isn't hooked up that way." One would think that circus people would be the conservative type and not use too much water. By and large they conserve; it's the First of Mays (newcomers) who use a lot of water for purposes which deplete the supply faster than normal. They are also the ones who usually complain the most when the cars run dry.

"The most misunderstood thing about water here by circus employees, especially new people who don't work train crew, is that the water does not fill continuously, but is pumped in only once a day," Eroo

Elephants unloading from a stock car in 1987. Richard Reynolds photo.



explains. "They expect to have water all the time, no matter what they do, just like back home. Foreign performers use lots of water. They do their own laundry, including show costumes. It saves those American dollars that are worth a lot in their home countries."

These are Enroe's reservations about over-use of water by residents who seem to think the water will never run out. He goes on to say that for personnel working the arena, show times can be crazy, but they're good for him, because "it keeps people away from the train" and from using up the water as fast as it's pumped in.

There are showers on private cars, and one on car 55 used by the train crew. The Waterman also has his practical recommendation for use of these facilities: "Wet your hair and body, then turn the water off and soap up. Afterwards, rinse off the soap and turn the water off again. It's just like being in a recreational vehicle.



The bi-level car that carried autos in 1987. Richard Reynolds photo.

"Every two years [with each new edition of the circus] the personnel changes, and with it the amount of water used changes. This year on the clown car and girls' car, for example, I've never seen so much water consumption. If people only knew that there are all kinds of variables in watering the train, they'd be more patient. Each car has its own "personality," notes Enroe. "Some cars fight you no matter what you do, others are so easy to get along with, it's fantastic. It all depends.

On long jumps, notices may be posted advising residents to conserve water as much as possible, yet cars occasionally run dry. During longer

jumps a "water stop" is made to feed the animals on board, and if no local water source, either from a hydrant or fire truck, is available, pre-filled tanks under the stock cars may be used to supply the thirsty non-human passengers.

Electric Power

The show's own generators supply power on board. Two Caterpillar diesel units are mounted in the dorm car RBX 43, and two more are on dorm car PBX 55, home of the author. Operating one unit at a time per car, and switching over to the other side every 200 hours, approximately once a week, the unit on RBX 43 supplies electricity for cars 35 through 48, running the heating and air conditioning, lights, televisions, stoves, and so forth. Current runs from car to car via a group of four cables: three for "hot" distribution of power and the fourth for excess loads during peak periods of use, such as when the company returns home after the evening's final performance.

This electrical system functions on a single-phase basis.

The units on RBX 55 supply power to cars 49 through 60 and the shop car, No. 34. A

passageway between the two units in either engine room provides access to the Pie Car from the upper end of the train. Red fencing panels guard the units from the passageway. They are removable for service access.

The loud roar of one of the Cats is somewhat muted inside the living area on the cars by the dense thickness of the wooden doors and walls, as well as a large washroom separating the engine room and dorm area of the car. The consistent, muffled tone heard in the dorm area actually drowns out many other sounds, such as radios, slamming doors, or the occasional noisy neighbor.

At the other end of the car around the roomettes, the noise is a steady hum, and after only a few weeks, new workmen may find it difficult to

sleep when either generator is not running. When the generator is shut down for servicing, the entire train's electrical system is run from a single Cat.

Each Cat is capable of a maximum 700 amps, but actual output is around 400 amps. Power is converted into 208 volts for air conditioning; everything else runs at 110 volts. Peak use of power can rev up a unit when the load becomes great, often resulting in sped-up electric clocks. Also, when units are shut down for major servicing, or if they shut themselves off for lack of fuel or water, or overheating, electric clocks will shut off like a computer dumping its programming. People have shown up late for work as a result of this.

These four generators on RBX 43 and RBX 55 are a 30 year old Caterpillar model, and are now gradually being replaced with that company's Model 3406, a new state-of-the-art power generator, said to cost \$36,000 new, but saving nearly 100 gallons of fuel weekly, in addition to being far more reliable. As of this aerating, one has already been installed aboard RBX 43 and seems to be working out quite satisfactorily, having been acquired by trading the former old unit.

Five 250-gallon tanks under the generator-dorm cars are filled every three days or so by a local fuel delivery truck, which tops them off with 1,200 to 1,300 gallons of diesel fuel. Power consumption works out to around 10 gallons of fuel an hour on continuous 24-hour service, according to one train crew electrician.

Stock car PBX 30, an ex-Union Pacific six axle baggage car now used to haul elephants, is equipped in one end with a smaller Onan Genset generator for powering lights and fans in the four stock-cars. Still smaller power plants are located under tunnel car PBX 28, as well as flat cars RBX 20 and RBX 23 to power lighting used when loading the train on departure night. Extension cords are plugged into standard sockets under the ends of each flatcar.

Noting a recent electrical development, the Red Unit's trainmaster said, "Before, the generator on RBX 43 powered cars 35 through 50, and the generator on RBX-55 powered cars 51 through 60 and 34. But the

electrical load was unbalanced, so the division between the two electrical sections was changed to between cars 49 and 50, resulting in smoother operation overall."

Car Recycling

At the Venice, Florida winter quarters cars are rebuilt or refurbished on a year round basis, with replacement cars entering service when a circus unit pulls into winter quarters or as cars are deadheaded out to a unit on the road. Ninety foot piggyback cars have side gunnels added for the placement of chains and tie-down binders, and seat cars are gutted to be refitted with standard size sleeper rooms in basically the same configuration as sleepers in Amtrak's Heritage fleet.

Picture the circus trains as mobile homes stretched out end to end and you pretty much have the picture of what the living conditions are like. Circus coaches are of two general varieties: public cars with a common hallway and private cars with rooms the full width of the car. Individual room decor is left up to the occupants just like tenants in an apartment building. Major changes in room configuration or additions of cabinets and shelves are usually approved by the unit's trainmaster and the work is performed by the occupant or by on the road carpenter crews. For reasons of clearance in the East, especially in the Northeast Corridor, excess height cars such as dome cars are not used in circus service.

The recycling process modifies cars to accommodate a variety of needs each show may require. When the Red Unit's RBX 29 Tunnel car was left in winter quarters in January 1986, it was quickly turned into a new Pie Car for the Blue Unit and sent to them in mid-season, replacing an aging car. And when the Red Unit pulled into Houston in August 1988, two new cars were waiting for them as RBX 40, a coach and RBX 24 a flat.

Former Providence & Worcester 4594 (ex-UP 5554) sported a shiny new silver paint job with no markings except a red "RBX 40" on each side at both ends, and a piece of

brown paper taped on each side which read "no hump." During the show's stand in Houston the train crew added banners to one side and painted a red stripe down each side, a mark indigenous to the Red Unit's coaches. Residents moving into the car from the "old" 40 were quick to praise the outstanding craftsmanship with which the interior had been built, complete with roomy, well equipped kitchens.

The old 40 was prepared for shipment back to winter quarters where it was scheduled to become the new RBX 54 for the Red Unit's 1989 season, releasing the "old" 54 for recycling.

The new RBX 24 flatcar (ex-NIFX 4025) was formerly used on the Blue Unit as a bi-level, and before that was the bi-level on the now-defunct Monte Carlo Circus. The upper tier was simply removed, allowing the Red Unit's wagons to ride on the car's original single deck. The old RBX 24 was sent with the old 40 to

with and changes with the times." The philosophy applies throughout the organization, including the rail car fleet. A prime example is RBX 35, the Red Unit's container car. This former 90-foot piggyback flat (ex-GTW 304235) had two rib-sided containers permanently attached to the deck and an interior access way added in "kitbash" fashion. It is essentially a 90-foot long closet, and more cars like it are planned for both circus units.

This container car replaced a 40-year old baggage car from the old California Zephyr passenger train. Named the Silver Beaver, this car (ex-WP 801) moved for the last time as a Red Unit car on January 11, 1988 when the show jumped from Miami to West Palm Beach, Florida, the first move of the season. About 11:00 p.m. that evening, the car, renumbered RBX 351 for billing purposes, was seen quietly tucked in ahead of a CSX freight train's two cabooses on its way back to quarters



A loaded flat car in 1987. Richard Reynolds photo.

IAIQ also, where it was to become a container car.

Autos on a circus bi-level car's upper tier are driven on and off via a set of narrow ramps which are placed down to the deck of a flatcar, or tunnel car, as is the case on the Red Unit. Autos are driven through the tunnel car, then off onto street level, and so the vehicles will clear the car's roof when ascending or descending. The bi-level is spotted 10 feet away from the tunnel car.

Producer Kenneth Feld says, "This circus survives because it keeps up

where it was scheduled to be rebuilt as a shop car for the Blue Unit. The move earlier that day saw more circus cars than Red Unit had ever carried: 45 cars between two CSX engines and caboose.

It is planned that at least two cars will be recycled and put in service each year, freeing up other cars for rebuilding as they reach or approach their 40-year use limit.

In Venice several tracks have recently been taken out of service. Sadly, this means that there is now room for only one unit's train in quarters at a time, so while one unit builds and rehearses a new edition, the other lays over in Miami, a prac-

tice which began in December 1987 and may continue into the foreseeable future,

In a side development Ringling in the late 1970s studied the Road-rail concept of highway trailers equipped with railroad wheels and coupling devices for possible use, but nothing has yet come out of this. However, new ways are always explored that might better equip and maintain the circus as a railroad show.

The numbering on certain cars may be changed as another car is added to the consist or replaced, and the total number of cars on a unit can vary from year to year. Currently each train is growing, and some winter quarters personnel suggest that each unit may have up to 50 cars by the turn of the century if the trend continues. This would certainly cut more cities from the tour as more and more track is removed each year, limiting the space where cars would need to be stored.

A 45th car was added to the Blue Unit in mid-season 1988. The Silver Beaver baggage car, recycled from a Red Unit storage car, became the new shop car for the Blue Unit's trainmaster Tom Dillon and his crew. This car has been rebuilt and will serve as the "nerve center" for train crew operations on the Blue Unit.

The Tunnel Car

A unique type of railcar created for the revitalized circus of the 1960s was called the Tunnel Car, so named for its appearance as a tunnel on wheels. Each end of the coach type (or baggage type) car was removed so that wagons and vehicles could be driven in or out of either end. These hollowed out cars saw extensive use before being gradually replaced by standard 90-foot piggyback flats.

When the Felds acquired the famous Circus Williams in the late 1960s, starring animal trainer Gunther Gebel-Williams, the huge addition made possible the creation of the Blue Unit, as Circus Williams became the nucleus of the Red Unit, according to Producer Kenneth Feld.

This was when piggyback flats came in handy for the large number of wagons being added, and the tunnel cars were gradually phased out.

When Union Pacific cars were acquired in 1972, 6-axle baggage cars became transportation for the larger animals, and some became new tunnel cars. By 1985, only two tunnel cars remained in circus service, cars 28 and 29 on the Red Unit, favored by management for their ability to protect vehicles from the elements and vandals. RBX 29 was removed from the consist in December 1985 and replaced by a flat car. It was recycled into the Blue Unit's new Pie Car (RBX.80) by mid-1986.

The remaining tunnel car, RBX 28, was treasured by Trainmaster Tim Holan, but progress finally caught up with it. The Red Unit's home run to the Venice winter quarters on November 21-22-23, 1988 was a funeral run for the last tunnel car, as it was left in quarters in 1989 for recycling into a horse stall car. It was replaced by flatcar, RBX 15.

The tunnel car was a favorite of circus personnel for another reason. It was the site of the infamous Ringling-Barnum Tunnel Car Party, an annual event attended by nearly every show employee, their guests, and employees of the local arena, usually held in New York City (on the "Concert Route") or in Washington, D.C. (on the "Rodeo Route"). The first season of a unit's two year run is called the "Concert Route," or even more familiar to some as the "Gravy Route," as this tour is generally so easy to play, usually only one city a week. The second year, "The Rodeo

A string of coaches in 1987. Richard Reynolds photo.

Route," is much harder with at least two cities per week for much of the year. It is on the Rodeo Route that the turnover rate of workmen increases with at least two to four new people every week.

Daylight of Tunnel Car Party day saw the train crew set ramps at one end of the car for access into it from ground level, then cover the entire floor with a layer of sawdust. Tables were brought in for food, plates and condiments, and a music center. Speakers were mounted in strategic locations, and a grill was set up at the far end under large fans that blew out the grill smoke. Barrels of ice with beer and soda were scattered around the car. Milk crates and train steps were used for seats inside, or outside on a layer of hay.

As personnel returned home to the train after the evening performance, they were treated to chicken, steak, hotdogs or anything else that could be barbecued. Trainmaster Tim Holan was the grill cook, and the music out of the car allowed the entertainers to be entertained for a change, and to wind down.

The car's own lighting system, consisting of standard light bulbs along the ceiling, powered from a small generator under the car's frame, provided plenty of illumination as the party continued past midnight, giving the train another role in circus family life.

The Tunnel Cars were a unique brand of modern railroading, brought on the scene by a company that still takes the initiative to design and build its own equipment, or change any existing car to meet new needs, something the railroad industry might take note of. And still, it's sad to note that the Tunnel Car is



now but another page of circus and railroad history.

The Circus Train Crew

Comprised of up to 16 people including the Trainmaster, car men, porters, electricians, and carpenters, this show crew is responsible for all the repairs and maintenance of the train cars while the show is on tour. Mostly new to railroading, the personnel may have been jobless locals looking for work in a town the show played, or perhaps related to someone in another show department, and are helping pay family finances. Some have never ridden a train before.

Those who can meet the pressures and demands of constant travel and the responsibilities that come with the job, whether or not they are new to railroading, come away with a working knowledge of car maintenance and a remarkably high awareness of what it takes to make a train roll safely. The circus trains are subject to the same FRA required regulations as all other railroad rolling stock, and when the R.W. Hunt Company inspected the Red Unit's train at West Palm Beach, Florida in January 1988 they found greatly improved conditions of the already superbly maintained cars, and "outstanding cooperation of the circus train crew, who repaired defects found as inspectors went along."

The R. W. Hunt Company furnishes quality control and safety inspectors worldwide for any type of equipment in industry or transportation. Hunt representatives Don Kjellberg, a retired BN passenger car shop superintendent, and Leonard Cole, a retired MoPac project engineer of cars, were the inspectors on four occasions during the Red Unit's 1987-1988 tour, the show's 117th edition.

"We found improvements every time," said Kjellberg, during the fourth inspection in the second week of August 1988 while the show played Houston.

Echoing a similar statement, Cole remarked, "On this train there's always improvement . . . it's very visi-



One of two wagons built as pools for the seals in 1987. The wagons with seals were in the back yard, but were not used later during the season and the seals remained in the owner's truck that went overland. Richard Reynolds photo.

ble."

Even show employees remark on how smooth the cars themselves ride.

The Red Unit's Trainmaster is Tim Holan. In his late 20s, Holan is a legally qualified Trainmaster and knows the circus train perhaps better than parents know their children. "It is my good fortune that a good attitude makes for content and safe employees. Thus, the belief that a good attitude makes for content and safe employees. Thus, the equation: a good circus train makes for a successful circus," says this boss of the crew responsible for every car, inside and out, from welding, washing and painting, to watering, COT&S duty, and supervising the removal of waste by a local septic service truck. "As for myself, I believe in using stricter standards than the FRA demands; we cannot afford any delays or having to sidetrack equipment."

The never ending job of keeping a train such as this safely runnable has recently become more demanding as it has been uprated for 60 mph travel. "There's always plenty to do," says Holan, who is responsible for making sure the train brings the circus into each town in time for the opening performance. A typical day will find the crew doing all manner of tasks, including details such as cleaning air cylinders, changing burned out light bulbs, putting in new floors when needed, checking fire prevention devices, lubing roller

bearings, and so forth.

With 44 cars to maintain, it should come as no surprise that the train crew is kept very busy, but that isn't all. With the show's Building Transportation Crew, it is the train crew car men who off-load all the wagons when the train arrives at each stand and loads them up again when the show departs.

Sometimes stands are very close, such as the 23-mile jump from the downtown Chicago Stadium to the Rosemont Horizon, a particularly busy time for the train crew and Building Transportation.

The train crew lives on board the coaches with the rest of the circus company and works out of a shop car which is a fully equipped total railroad repair facility on wheels. This mobile shop also houses the trainmaster's office. Material for every conceivable type of railcar repair are kept here, and smaller, more general materials are kept in possum bellies under each car, including several flatcars. Some of these possum bellies were added to the cars after purchased by the show.

Air conditioning units have proven to be the costliest items to maintain, especially during the hot summer months, and rough train handling doesn't help. It is during the hotter season that sheets of aluminum foil are taped against the windows for added insulation, a practice which seem to work very well.

In 1986 the train crew installed security spotlights to the upper ends of all the coaches. These bright lights keep large areas around the train lit at night like neighborhood streetlights, and during a jump at night the long line of lights present a most unusual spectacle, illuminating large areas along the right of way and drawing much attention from residents in homes near the track as the lights flash past their windows.

After each jump the crew performs an inspection on every car regardless of how long the train will be spotted, whether two days, two weeks, or two months. "Whenever we do inspections, people always turn their water on," says Assistant Trainmaster

Bruce Davis, as he checks inside a truck frame amidst draining water. "Especially when it's cold out," adds crewman Shayne Donald with a touch of humor, writing down each defect found as the two move along. Davis continues. "As far as heavy maintenance such as changing out wheel sets is concerned, critical problems are taken care of immediately and less critical problems are taken care of on an as time permits basis. But nothing is left for too long. We schedule repairs around the jump schedule and its [resulting] demands," he says.

Today's inspection isn't turning up anything exciting, as preventive maintenance has been keeping the cars up to or beyond FRA standards. As Davis checks equipment, he remarks, "Tim is known to tell crewmen 'You could park this train in one spot up to a year and never run out of things to do.' It's an on-going thing." He moves beneath the 42 end of RBX 43 with a lantern, looking.

Crawling out, the back of his head whacks against the car's under frame, and with a tilt of his head and a scratch, he moves on to RBX 42. Tim Holan will later review the list Shayne is writing to decide what warrants repair first. Other items are placed in order of repair as per their degree of importance.

This job is highly demanding, but the team spirit is great enough to keep some people here for years. Others aren't so adaptable, and so fall by the wayside, which is why the overall circus workforce has such a large turnover rate. The show's entire workforce--including train crew--are part of Teamsters Local 688 out of St. Louis, Missouri.

Touring

Even by today's standards, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows is still a huge operation, expanded by a third in 1988 by the newly created Gold Unit which began playing under tents (plastic, not canvas) and in arenas in Japan. The Gold Unit traveled in containers.

In the United States, the Red Unit currently carries a large Asian elephant named Tommy, but billed as King Tusk. This animal is so huge that he doesn't fit into the show's railcars, so he is carried overland in

a giant custom designed 18-wheeler. Also, since the train's stock cars are not equipped with facilities for carrying sea lions, the 117th edition's sea lions are carried overland in their trainer's vehicles.

The longest stand the Ringling-Barnum Circus plays is in New York City, where patrons of Madison Square Garden may see the Greatest Show on Earth from six to ten weeks. The show's shortest stands are during "split weeks" when two cities are played in a single week, usually the first on Tuesday and Wednesday, and the second on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The cities the show plays depend on if a railroad siding is close enough. The closest spotting is perhaps Lexington, Kentucky, where the coaches are parked outside the back door. The farthest spotting is when the show plays Richfield (Cleveland), Ohio where the train is parked 30 miles south near Akron, and the flats and stocks are taken to Richfield via the Cuyahoga Valley railway, sometimes behind steam power! Extra buses are chartered to ferry employees to work each day.



Truck used to carry King Tusk overland. Bob MacDougall photo.

El Paso Bound

Growing up a stage actor and musician, as well as a die-hard rail fan, the railroad circus environment came as a timely answer to many prayers for a job where these, this author's greatest interests, might be combined. And being bitten by the bug to travel cinched it.

I am frequently asked questions about life on the circus train, and thought it would be fun to share a personal, written account of a ride aboard. Which jump would be worthy of such a story about The

Greatest Show On Earth's circus train?

Philadelphia ends the eastern portion of the Concert Route; the second year of the tour is the Rodeo Route. The next stands are in Arizona in order to get the show to the California stands which are booked far in advance. In 1987, circus promoters were unable to book an arena mid-way between Philly and Arizona because of prior engagements with one exception: El Paso, Texas.

Tulsa, Oklahoma was moved from the Rodeo to Concert Route for the Blue Unit's 118th-edition in 1988, and their Concert Route stand in Tucson, Arizona was cancelled due to a boat show playing in the arena there the only week the circus had open for that town. The Blue Unit went on to Phoenix, Arizona from Tulsa.

Up to 1987 the longest jump between cities of any circus, to the best of my knowledge, had been made before the turn of the century by the Nickel Plate Circus, owned by W. H. Harris, from Halifax to Winnipeg, Canada--2,200 miles. This record was broken in 1987 when the

Ringling Red Unit jumped from Philadelphia to El Paso, Texas on a four day, 2336-mile run through seven states and over five railroads. This author personally called it "The Great El Paso Jump of 1987." Although the pie car's menu board noted it with much less fanfare: each day it listed the date, and simply "El Paso Bound."

It's been said that "it's the going, and not the getting there, that's fun," and therefore it would be on these incredible four days that I became inspired to take notes and write about what we experienced and perceived, highballing on what I call the Moonlight Lady. To be continued.

The 2008 CHS Convention September 21 to 24

By Bob Cline

All roads were leading north and east to the fantastic 2008 edition of the Circus Historical Society Convention in West Springfield, Massachusetts.

Upon their arrival at the Clarion Inn off of Route 5, all attendees were greeted by the smiling faces of President Robert Sabia, Treasurer Joe Parker, and Susan Sabia at the sign in table. This year's 71 attendees received their name tags, schedule of events, and a goody bag from local area merchants.

About 40 members participated in a meet and greet social event on Sunday evening inside the beautiful hotel center court surrounded by beautifully designed landscaping and the pool. Later that evening the Board of Trustees gathered in the Director's Room for a three hour meeting on various issues ranging from the use of PayPal for membership renewals to ways to expand the membership to various suggestions for the continued success of the Bandwagon.

Additional items discussed included adding more photo displays in the Bandwagon, the need for more articles for the Bandwagon, and how to increase membership. President Sabia then asked that we all recognize the incredible longevity and dedication to the Bandwagon of Fred Pfening Jr. Also recognized for her endless hours of work on the CHS website as our webmaster was Vice-President Judy Griffin.

Monday morning began with Paul Horsman offering his circus items for sale at the back of the room. President Sabia called the convention attendees to order, welcoming one and all. In a quick piece of business attendees were asked if they could live without the continued issuance of a membership card. In looking at ways to control our budget, it was proposed that we still issue a membership card and certificate to new members but eliminate



Left to right CHS president Robert Sabia, speaker Wayne McCary, treasurer Joe Parker and secretary Bob Cline. Vice president Judy Griffin, is seated.

the cards each year thereafter, which not only saves money, but saves time in sorting them into the correct envelopes for mailing.

A convention of this magnitude entails many forms of audio/visual

Gordon Turner and his 1956 Ringling-Barnum exhibit.



use. In addition to the hotel staff assisting all they could, member Rick Perdue took the platform as the official technical support liaison and kept all the presentations running smoothly the entire time. Sabia opened the presentations with a fine display of early circus films from the 1890's to 1938 featuring a lot of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Also included was some color film from the Pat Valdo collection of the Ringling operated Wild West show at the 1939 New York World's Fair.

Gordon Turner had a table top display of the Ringling-Barnum blow down in Geneva, New York on July 1, 1956. It featured many fine photos he took that day as well as a tent stake, ridge rope and a piece of the big top.

Turner was also the pitchman for this year's Camel Pins from the



Ward Hall and presenter Lane Talburt.

OABA Animal Fund. Sabia continued his film presentation with color film highlights of the Ringling show in the 1940's.

Lane Talburt gave a great series of video clips on the side show of the future and how people are getting in the business instead of out. Talburt featured a couple of interviews with

Presenters David Carlyon and John McConnell.



folks on the Ward Hall and Chris Christ Side Show. Almost all of their employees are college graduates. One member named Tommy Green was interviewed and shown working as a sword swallower and midway talker for the show. Tommy graduated from Rutgers University with a Bachelors of Science degree in theater and a minor in biology.

The Clarion Inn provided a lunch with baked chicken, breads, vegeta-

bles, desserts, and drinks. Needless to say, no one went hungry. John McConnell presented an amazing story about the life, death, and resurrection of the Shrine Circus and the Detroit Shrine Circus in particular. John has been involved with over 200 Shrine Circuses and owned Circus Royale for about 10 years. During the 1960's it was estimated that 3000 circus performers a year worked in Shrine shows with 143 Temples having a circus every year. Detroit is the oldest Shrine Circus in America and the very first one to use a phone room. Unfortunately, the Shrines are notorious for changing dates, locations, producers, and Shrine nobility is at least partially to blame for the current downward spiral.

Bob Sugarman offered a fine presentation on the history of the Flying Cavarettas. The four sisters and one brother did not grow up in the circus, but rather joined the business at an early age. Two of the sisters started performing with Faye Alexander. By the age of 13, one sister, Terry,

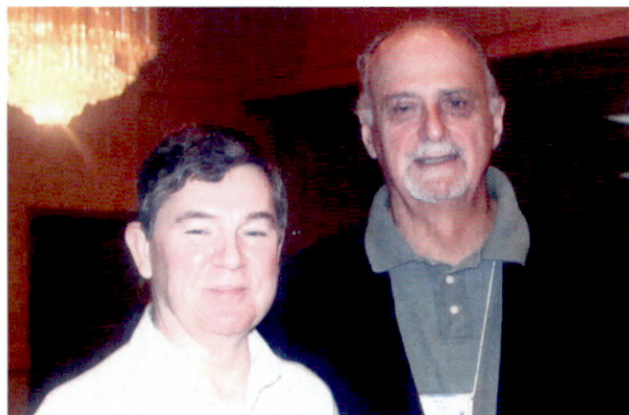
was catching the triple somersault on a regular basis. Despite the family members growing up, getting married, and having children of their own they kept one of the best flying acts together for almost 25 years and called Circus

Circus Casino in Las Vegas home for many of those years.

Richard Flint then enthralled all with a wonderful presentation on the life and times of the great African-American elephant trainer Ephraim Thompson. Born in Canada to escaped slaves from Kentucky, Thompson became involved with the circus at an early age on the Adam Forepaugh show. By 1880 he was listed as the assistant head of the cookhouse. By 1883 he was in charge of the elephant and camel tent and by 1885 he was training the elephant John L. Sullivan for a boxing routine. So great were his talents that he was talked into leaving for Europe in 1885 by his friend and soon to be mentor Leo West. Thompson gained critical acclaim in Europe, working between 3 and 7 elephants. Friedlander Lithograph produced 10 different posters for Thompson over the years. He died in 1908 and is buried in Paris.

The International Circus Hall of Fame was represented by Tom Dunwoody. The Hall of Fame is 16 years old in Peru, Indiana and just completed its most successful season ever. They had a large gala and art auction in May that did very well. They took the summer show to West Baden, Indiana for a promotion along with the restoration of a couple of the buildings used in town by the circuses of years gone by. The American Circus Corporation owned 19 different show titles over the years. The show went to the Indiana State Fair for the 4th time this year as a free attraction. Next year, the

Presenters Dick Flint and Bob Sugarman.



Peru City Circus Festival celebrates its 50th year. There were 40 units in the parade this year. Tommy Hanneford and Unus were inducted into the Hall of Fame. The Hall of Fame will be resurrecting the old Ringling-Barnum cage #74 as its next restoration project.

The first day's presentations then concluded with some video footage of Ward Hall in action on the midway bally when all of a sudden the power goes out and he immediately swings into a candlelight show like you have never seen before at a reduced price for this show and this show only. Johnny Meah and Ward Hall were interviewed together about their careers and the banners Johnny has painted over the years.

Everyone had the opportunity to enjoy a lot of visiting and story telling while they grabbed some supper on their own. Anticipation was building for the circus auction that would follow later that evening. At 7:00 p.m., the auction began with auctioneer Al Stencell at the helm taking any and all bids as they came. When the smoke cleared, the CHS had \$1400.00 to add to its coffers. The next morning, Stencell greeted everyone and explained the CHS is involved in the SABAD campaign. This is Save a Book a Day. Many of the books offered at the auction were rescued from the vaults and basements of public libraries after they had been removed from daily use. Many of the titles were hard to find such as Louis Roth's book.

The second day of presentations got under way with John Polacesk speaking on the circus in film in the National Archives. Having gone to Maryland, he wandered about the National Archives and found numerous bits and pieces of circus footage from old newsreels, including the Henry Ford film collection and some great film of the Cole Bros. Circus in the New York Hippodrome in 1937 during a show sponsored by Mrs. Wm Randolph Hearst. Beatty actually closed the show, rather than opened it.

David Carlyon joined us after a mad dash from the Clown College reunion in Baraboo for his presentation on how a "Picture is Worth 757 Words" in analyzing posters from the

Strobridge Lithograph Company in the late 19th century. Carlyon discussed the evolution from more to less words, better graphics, and precise statements such as an 80 foot fall at a 50 degree angle to generate the excitement that the circus poster required to sustain the public's excitement long enough for the circus to get there.



Presenters Steve Freese and Rob Mermin.

Bob Cline then gave a very fast paced run through of the Campbell Bros. Circus out of Fairbury, Nebraska that toured from 1896 to 1912. In what started out as simply wanting to get his elephant records more complete and not knowing anything to speak of about the show's 11 elephants in 1908 to 1912, Cline researched the Campbell's operation for its last two years. He developed an extensive historical compilation and met Sam Campbell, a CHS member and a great grandson from the Oklahoma side of the family. So there is a huge story to tell in Bandwagon in the very near future.

Dr. Eric Metcalfe then concluded the morning's affairs with a discussion of how the shows reached the audiences in the 19th century. Having a great, great uncle named Ben Cotton who was a renowned blackface entertainer, he followed him through the Civil War, river boat shows along with vaudeville and stage. Cotton died in 1904 after 50 years in the entertainment field. Dr. Metcalfe discovered the CHS through our website and we were delighted to have him with us.

A wonderful lunch was then served at the Clarion Inn with sandwiches,

salads, fruits, desserts and drinks again being provided as part of the convention package. No one complained of being hungry and no one had the opportunity to fall asleep afterward when Rob Mermin, the founder of Circus Smirkus and former Dean of Ringling-Barnum's Clown College, took the stage to give us a look into his life in the circus business, beginning when he went to Europe to learn how to become a clown. He offered many videos taken on European shows and slowly drifted into the successful youth movement that Circus Smirkus has taken a leading role. Ringling-Barnum has signed 15 of its clowns into the hallowed halls of the Greatest Show on Earth, while others have joined acts such as the Wallendas of seven high fame.

The Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin was represented this year by CEO Steve Freese. They are marketing their new logo that simply says "Circus World." They had a great year again except for the major flood that came in June and forced the closing of the Museum for five days. The flooding caused about quarter million dollars in damages. They are currently working on all the FEMA paperwork and trying to get a Hazard Mitigation grant to relocate the three rail cars on display in the yard to a building that will provide shelter and still be a display. The Gala of Chefs fund raising event took in about \$40,000 more than budgeted. The train sheds are going out for bid in November for replacement of all windows and tracks inside and out as well as concrete floors.

The library has received a grant for the digitization of glass plate negatives. The library will be closed on Mondays in the immediate future to allow Erin Foley, the archivist, time to work on this project. The Museum will receive a scanner, a plotter, a high speed printer and a computer to do the job. Prints from these negatives will then be posted on the internet for all to see. The library provided a huge assist to the Chazen Art Display in Madison with many side show banners being displayed. It also received over \$9000 in fees for the use of images in the new Taschen circus book.

The museum has signed a contract to present the Great Circus Parade in Milwaukee next year on July 12th with 52 wagons from the Circus World Museum going to Milwaukee by truck. The train is obsolete and is prohibitively expensive to fix. Along with the parade, the Kelly-Miller Circus will be on the waterfront site and the CHS 2009 convention will be held in Milwaukee as well.

Circus clown historian Pat Cashin also made a fast path back from the Clown College reunion to give us all some great film footage of some of the greatest clowns in the business. He brought the presentations of our extravaganza to a close.

The annual banquet was held Tuesday evening to the delight of all with a social hour beginning the evening and then a talk by our featured speaker, Wayne McCary, the CEO of the Big "E" Fair. McCary spoke of the festival in Monte Carlo, the legislative changes in animal laws and that the Big "E" was adamant in defending the presentation of animals in the future. A wonderful meal followed with a choice of pork or fish as the main entrée. A good time was had by all. An even better time was enjoyed by several of the night owls when Ward Hall recruited several members to become his newest side show attractions and gave an off the wall introduction and bally for all to hear and see for the first time anywhere in America.

Wednesday morning started with all joining together on two buses that took us to the Big "E" and dropped us off on the grounds in front of the big top. A catered brunch awaited all inside the ring curb as members of the CFA's Wayne McCary Tent joined us along with circus and carnival model builders and Outdoor Amusement Business Association personnel. There were several presentations made to Wayne McCary on behalf of all who know him. Robert Johnson and Paul Ingrassia spoke on behalf of the OABA animal fund. A period of time was available for all to enjoy the "Colossal Circus

Poster" exhibit provided by Greg Parkinson Enterprises. Chris Berry was the major contributor to this fine exhibition. Berry was a CHS member years ago and has now re-joined us.

The Big "E" Super Circus kicked off its fabulous performance at one o'clock with reserved seating for all circus groups there. Johnny Peers worked the come in and the Flying Pages opened the show. After their performance was completed, Wayne McCary announced that the Flying Pages were going to be inducted into the Big "E" Walk of Fame for their years of dedicated performances at the fair. A dog act followed the ceremony. An incredible display of strength and agility was then presented by Duo Fusion. They were young, energetic, and sassy. Suffice it to say that when she did a bend over backwards and he then did a hand stand on her, the entire audience winced in agony. They were truly amazing.

Struppi Hanneford. Bob Sugarman photo.

Sylvia Zerbini was as striking a persona as ever while astride her horse and hanging on a lyre rising in the air. Her stallions are so beautiful and she incorporates her lyre routine into the act with flawless ease. Anyone who has seen her act knows they have seen something quite dazzling and without compare.

A couple young ladies from Armenia then did the most exquisite contortion act I have ever seen when one young lady folded herself over



backwards and crept into a glass box just barely large enough for this nimble performer. The second young lady then bent herself over backwards also then managed to enter the glass box already occupied by the first lady and squeezed both of them into the glass box at the same time.

Sylvia Zerbini.

The show closed with four Carson and Barnes elephants presented by Tim Frisco, featuring the five year old male elephant Obert. The animals were fast and well cared for. It was pleasure to speak with Billy Martin, the show host, Sylvia Zerbini and Tim Frisco after the show.

The afternoon was for conventioners' pleasure as this magnificent fair featured exhibits from every state in New England in their own buildings, the permanent displays in the circus museum, the Amusements of America Carnival on the midway, Susan Rix and her bears, a Sea Lion show and photo opportunities, the Budweiser stables and an eight horse hitch, Hallaman Farms and their eight horse hitch, a daily parade, an evening Mardi Gras parade, free concert entertainment, the Commerford Petting Zoos and two Stinson Band Organs at work throughout the day. Not to be forgotten was the circus music that played on the fair's loud speakers all day long.

We all had the opportunity to catch a bus throughout the day to return to the hotel. A good many of us returned at 8:00 p.m. knowing we had a wonderful day behind us and a long way home the next day. On behalf of all who attended, I believe we all felt it was a wonderful time. We hated to see it end and the weather cooperated immensely, making it even more enjoyable. I look forward to being able to see you all in Milwaukee next July.



The 1897 Barnum & Bailey Circus Parade

In 1897, the Barnum and Bailey Greatest Show on Earth was the biggest thing that moved by night. Everything was carried on 58 railroad cars, seven coaches, four box and elephant cars, 16 stock cars, and 31 flats. Four advance cars traveled ahead.

The talent in and out of the ring was extraordinary. The executive staff was for the most part long-time employees, some of whom had worked for James A. Bailey, by then the show's sole owner, back in the Cooper and Bailey days. This continuity and its attendant institutional memory was certainly one of the reasons for the company's success. For the devotees of field show history, the names resonate today in the same way baseball aficionados revere members of the Hall of Fame. Many of them were among the best to ever pursue their specialty. Louis E. Cooke was general agent; Tody Hamilton was head of the press and contracting departments. Clarence Dean and Harvey Watkins were also press agents. Treasurer Merritt Young died in June. Charles R. Hutchinson came over from the Buffalo Bill Wild West to replace him, beginning a long tenure with the Barnum and later the Ringling-Barnum circuses.

Frank Hyatt was the general superintendent in charge of getting the enterprise on and off the lot. Byron Rose was trainmaster, and George Conklin ran the menagerie. Elephant Bill Newman bossed the pachyderms. Carl Clair directed the band.

One name on the roster was a specter of seasons past: Mathew Scott, of Jumbo fame and infamy, was listed as the lowly keeper of a single dog cage. Another name recalled the wagon show days of the 1860s and 1870s: the highly respected Henry Barnum, superintendent of forage, had run a unit of the Van Amburgh Menagerie in the 1860s, and bought into Howes Great London in 1874.

Sideshow attractions were a mixture of real freaks and eccentric performers. Among the human oddities were Jojo the dog-faced boy, Chinese and Russian midgets, a giantess, and Zip the What Is It. The weird artistes included Prof. Vito and his cat minstrels, a sword swallower, marionettes, a snake charmer, a card manipulator, a Circassian lady, a fire eater, a magician, and a lightning calculator.

As was the norm in the late 19th century, the big show emphasized horses. Acts were presented in three rings and two stages, which were almost constantly filled. Principal female bareback riders included Rose Wentworth, Rose Meers, Quika Meers, and Josie Ashton. Principal male bareback riders were William Showles, Levater Lee, Ernest Melville, and Archie O'Brien. The performance concluded with a series of hippodrome races. John O'Brien's fabulous 70 horse liberty act was a feature.

Non-equine talent included the Zedoras, an aerial act that introduced Alar the human arrow; Aida and Adele Hera in an acrobatic routine; Irme Orbassany with her trained cockatoos; Charles White with trained goats; Nicholas Ceballos, high wire; Leon Laroche, "mysterious spiral globe;" and John Collier, performing bull.

The season opened in New York's Madison Square Garden on 1 April. The show headed for the Deep South in May, unlike most shows that played Dixie in the fall. The circus toured the Midwest from early June through mid-September before going in to West Virginia and Pennsylvania. The year's end came on 9 October after a week in Philadelphia. The circus had traveled 9865 miles.

While the route book proclaimed the season a great financial success, in truth it was mediocre at best. The \$62,894 dividend was the smallest since Bailey's initial affiliation with the company in 1881. It was the third straight year of falling profitably, and the first time since 1880 that receipts dipped below \$800,000. Compared to the 1882 dividend of \$602,000 on income of \$1,333,788, the 1897 figures were pitiful. In large measure Barnum and Bailey's declining fortunes in America explain the show's five year hiatus in Europe, where, by all accounts, the company coined money.

The parade was in transition in 1897. The old and elegant Howes Great London Globe and Elephant tableaux had been modified and sent to Forepaugh-Sells, of which Bailey was part owner. In their stead the Five Graces bandwagon, pulled by forty horses, was brought over from the defunct Forepaugh show, along with at least one tableau wagon with a lion motif. Holdovers from the Barnum and London days included the nursery rhyme-themed pony floats, the beautiful Fielding cages, and the so-called New York tableaux. This was essentially the parade equipment that went to England the next year. When the troupe returned to America for the 1903 season, Bailey revamped the procession with thirteen mostly magnificent new vehicles including the Two Hemispheres bandwagon.

The following images were taken at Saginaw, Michigan on 13 August 1897. They are part of a group of sixteen photos, each approximately 3 1/2" square. The shots reveal the excitement and energy of circus day 111 years ago. While the pictures speak for themselves, a few observations are worth noting: the forty horse hitch on the Five Graces, a new feature that year; the stylish howdah and blanket over the big elephant; the odd Columbus float about to turn the corner of the Bancroft House, Saginaw's finest hotel; the lack of advertising banners, blankets, or headdresses on the elephants; the large grotesque heads on the former Forepaugh lion tableau; and Jim Thomas handling the reins of the 40 horse hitch. Fred D. Pfening III



Former Forepaugh wagon with the "Funny Heads."



Bannerless, blanketless, and headdressless elephants.



Pony floats in a parade.



Jim Thomas at reins of 40 horse hitch on Five Graces.

Forty horse team pulling Five Graces bandwagon.





Elephants turning corner in front
of Bancroft House.



Big Indian elephant with fancy howdah.



Columbus float turning at Bancroft House.

Jockey riders in parade.



Former Fourpaugh tableau turning corner.

Tommy Bentley

Performer and Circus Owner

By Bill Taggart

Tommy Bentley was born in Williamson, West Virginia on January 22, 1926. The parents of the future showman were Nancy and Harry Bentley. The family had lived in that part of the country for many years. Tommy's mother taught in a country school and his dad was a deputy sheriff and a part time small farmer. He had four brothers Lloyd, Bob, Pat, and Larry. His sisters were Alma, Delores, Julie, Zelda, and Esty.

Tommy was four or five when the depression began and remembers the hard times in that part of the country. The family managed to survive on his mother's earnings as she worked hard to feed a large family. They always had a cow named Bessie, a calf, and several pigs as well as a yard full of chickens. They also had draft horses that Tommy cared for and little did he know that one day he would be a member of the Hodgini riding act in the circus world. The future circus man gained experience working with animals as a youngster.

Tommy remembers that they all had to work in the large vegetable garden, planting, weeding, and picking the

produce. He also remembers that the family ate well during the winter months on all of the wonderful vegetables that his mother canned each season and the hogs that were butchered.

About the age of thirteen, Tommy was not getting along with his alcoholic father and was tired of continual beatings from the old man. One night he decided to pack up a few belongings and hike down the road to his Aunt Lola's which was a bit far away. Her home was in Logan about thirty miles away. He wanted to stay there awhile until his mother could patch up things for him with his dad. On that summer day as he walked along the country road to Logan he began to see colorful posters on farm barns advertising Barnett Brothers Circus.

He was totally surprised when he walked over a hill and saw the white tops of Barnett Brothers on a grassy lot outside of town. It was the first time young Tommy had ever seen a circus. Little did he know that one day he would rise to the top of the circus world with his own circus, Bentley Brothers. That, however, was many years into the future.

Tommy was tired, hungry and also excited to see the tents. He walked onto the lot, found the back yard, and spotted the small dining tent. A

friendly cook took a look at the tired boy and quickly figured out that the toe headed youngster needed a sandwich, a bowl of warm soup, and a cold drink. After he finished his first circus meal the cookhouse manager asked the youngster about his plans and asked if he could use a job; after all they did need a dish washer. Tommy Bentley's introduction to show business was as a pearl diver.

Barnett Brothers was owned by Ray W. Rogers whose family was excellent circus performers and workers. They were out of Nova Scotia, Canada but wintered in York, South Carolina. Tommy says, "You can still see a sign saying Circus Winter Quarters where a lumber yard now stands."

The little three ring circus featured a family riding act created by Pinky and Bessie Hollis, well known mud show performers out of Maryland. The summer of 1938 Tommy worked the season in the cookhouse and that winter he washed dishes at the Wallace Café in York, owned by the late Senator Snook Rogers, a friend of the circus owner.

When the 1939 season approached Tommy asked Mr. Rogers if he could clown on the show. The owner arranged for producing clown Ed Raymond to teach Tommy how to create and apply a clown face, and to develop a routine for walk arounds and other spots. He clowned the entire season and between shows the energetic and popular Tommy rehearsed for the Rogers family riding act. Pinky and Bessie Hollis worked with him as well as Norma and Helen Rogers and their cousin Flo McIntosh. With Tommy and the three attractive young ladies it was a flashy and exciting riding act.

Others on the show were Texas Ted





Texas Ted Lewis.

Lewis whose wife Dorothy was later Mrs. Bill Hill. The Ino Family, a sensational Japanese risley act, was there as well as Ray Godden, a Rogers' cousin and a tight wire walker. A young Gaylord Maynard was on the show and he and Tommy became good friends. Gaylord's father was the band director. Until his untimely death Gaylord worked at Arabian Knights in Kissimmee Florida with his popular trick horse act.

In many forms of entertainment during the early part of the last century, many a female role was played by a man in drag. This is also true of the circus world. Such future stars as the sensational trapeze star Barquette and wire walker Berta Beeson were men who performed their routines in drag. Slat Beeson once told me that his family had him

Lee Powell and the 1940 Wallace Bros. band and some performers.



work in drag because he could earn a higher salary.

It wasn't long before Tommy found himself playing a female in the riding act. Because of his slight build but powerful strength, Tommy was a shoo in. His first female role was performing a dangerous trick on horseback in which he lay down flat on the horse's back, head hanging over the horse's rump, while the horse galloped around the ring at a high speed. This was a much applauded feat until one day, when he was performing the trick, the audience began laughing hysterically. Tommy managed to look around and see that his wig was hooked and hanging on one of the quarter poles supporting the big top.

When young, Tommy was often approached by other acts asking him if he could learn certain tricks and work to enhance their acts. He would always reply, "Of course," and practice between shows and later join the act. The young showman learned trapeze, some juggling, and to walk the slack wire during his early years on the road.

In the 1940 season Barnett Bros. Circus went out as Wallace Brothers Circus and featured the Coco Cola elephant act trained and presented by Mac MacDonald. Senator Wallace and a York Chevrolet dealer Bill Dunlap helped to finance the show.

The great aerialist Mabel Ward was featured on the show. She was the widow of cowboy star Tom Mix. The Tanarake Japanese perch and

foot sliding act was also there. The concert or wild west show featured Lee Powell, the original movie Lone Ranger. He later married Norma Rogers, daughter of the show owner. During the war Lee Powell joined the Marines and died on Iwo Jima.

After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 Tommy and a group of performers enlisted in the Army but after boot camp he was honorably discharged and almost immediately joined Cole Brothers Circus in Peru Indiana. When not with the circus Tommy worked the drag show circuit in Chicago and in New Orleans he worked many seasons at the then famous My-Oh-My Club in New Orleans. He could mc a show, tell a few off-color stories, and sing a few comedy songs in the Sophie Tucker and Ray Bourbon style. He enjoyed entertaining and life in the French Quarter until it was spring and time to hit the sawdust trail again.

He loved being on Cole Brothers Circus in 1944, the first railroad show he was on. He started working in clown alley and eventually walked the slack wire and did the slide for life. The standing slide for life required the artist to walk up an inclined plane in ballet-type shoes to a height of 40 feet. Upon reaching the pinnacle, he began to slide down the wire backwards to be caught at the bottom, hopefully, by a group of men. Tommy eventually did this act in drag until one day he overheard a member of the audience say, "Look at the size of those feet on that broad." That was the end of Miss Bentley's slide for life from then on it was Mr. Tommy Bentley.

On the Cole show Tommy worked with the great Con Colleano, the riding Hodgini troupe, of which he was a member, the Harold Voise Flyers and the Nelson family.

Zack Terrell, the owner of the show, was fond of Tommy and paid him extra money to wash and iron his expensive shirts when Tommy had spare time.

Tommy also worked with Paul Nelson to learn dressage riding. The Cole show was noted for the quality of its equine stock as Terrell loved well bred Kentucky saddle horses.



Tommy Bentley and the large wire act on Kelly-Miller. Bentley collection

At one time, during the war years Tommy remembers going to a War Bond Rally in Indianapolis, and seeing film stars out selling war bonds. The great Carol Lombard was there that day and left later for her home in California. Of course on that flight she died in a fiery plane crash in the mountains. It was January 16, 1942. Tommy remembers the film star giving the V or victory sign before boarding the plane.

Tommy, Grace and Flo McIntosh on Kelly-Miller.



In 1946 he was on King Bros. as announcer, wire act and wardrobe designer.

In 1947 M. J. Dalesio, known as Mickey Dales, formed a partnership with David and "Deacon" McIntosh. The McIntoshs had been mechanics on the Ray Rogers shows. Their new show was titled Dales Bros. Circus. In 1948 Tommy performed his slide for life on the show. He walked up a forty-foot inclined wire and slid down backwards. He also worked a single trap act and rode a ménage horse.

In 1949 he was an aerialist on the John Pawling Great London Circus. In 1951 he worked his slack wire act on Biller Bros. Circus.

In 1952 Bentley joined the Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Circus, where he remained through the 1957 season. His slide for life was the opening number each year. He also worked dogs and ponies. In 1952 he worked with Florence and Grace McIntosh in the Florenze wire act. In 1954 he was announcer, did the slide for life, worked the pony act and handled the programs

He also appeared in Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey Circus as a member of a riding act.

After appearing on many circuses under canvas and in buildings Tommy came to the attention of the great circus owner Elfie Althoff. As she became aware of his ability as a performer and presenter of various acts she contracted him for her show. He became a house act with her

for an astonishing 19 years. During this time Elfie taught Tommy about the front end of the business and promotions. The long friendship lasted until Elfie's death in Austria.

It was during this period that Tommy met his future business partner Charles Clancy.

Eventually Bentley and Clancy became partners and formed Bentley Bros. Circus on March 19, 1977. Their first tour consisted of two dates, opening in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, but unfortunately the shows were cancelled



Tommy on Golden Dawn in 1955.

because the building was flooded. Undaunted, they proceeded to the next date in the only vehicle they owned, a used laundry truck. Tommy said of their future, "We have no money, but we have big mouths and a lot of hope!"

The second year Bentley Bros. Circus fared better when the late Clifford Vargas, owner of Circus

Tommy and the McIntosh sisters.





A Bentley Bros. Circus semi.

Vargas, gave Tommy some of his East Coast dates and leased him some trucks and rings curbs on credit. With that new beginning Tommy and Clancy were able to take their circus coast to coast, covering over 15 states, and playing over 150 cities. They framed the show so that it could play ballparks and other outdoor venues.

The show was then enlarged to present a big top performance. By 1979 the show was well established.



The Bentley Bros. ballpark show.

That year the two and a half hour performance included Jorge Barreda's wild animal act; the Wynn family's neck slide, motorcycle on wire and table balancing; Tony Smaha's menage horse; the Dionnes, hand balancing; Herbie Weber's low wire act; Myimmba's baboons; Mario and Roberta Zerbini, arobats and family riding act; Norbu, gorilla parody; Joselito, high wire and Ben

The Bentley Bros. big top.



DeWayne with three elephants.

On June 6, 1999 Bentley and Clancy sold the circus to Robert and Diane Moyer, who owned the elephants, camels and wild animals on Bentley for a number of years. The purchase included a big top seating 2,500, 16 trucks and trailers including a number of seat wagons.

Bentley has always been willing and able to teach young people various circus arts including tumbling, rid-ing, working animals, juggling, and trapeze. His most famous pupil was George Allen, now retired. When

performing 40 feet in the air George was a graceful trapeze artist and would end his act with a spectacular iron jaw routine.

In his prime when on a circus lot Tommy always saw what had to be done and he didn't hesitate to help set rigging, tear down the heavy and huge cat arena, present the camel act, work the elephants, crack the whip for the riding act, or sell tickets in the wagon. When short of candy butchers Tommy sold cotton candy and worked the seats with the

best of the candy butchers.

When Bentley framed and presented a show it had all the elements of a great circus from the beautiful aerial ballet, the hilarious clown routines (whether it be a clown car caper or the washer women routine,) graceful and daring trapeze artist a fast paced dog act skillfully presented, and almost always an exceptionally talented Moroccan tumbling act. Trained and talented lions, tigers, camels, and elephants were also a part of many of Tommy and Clancy's productions.



Tommy Bentley on New Year's Eve in 2000. Author's photo.

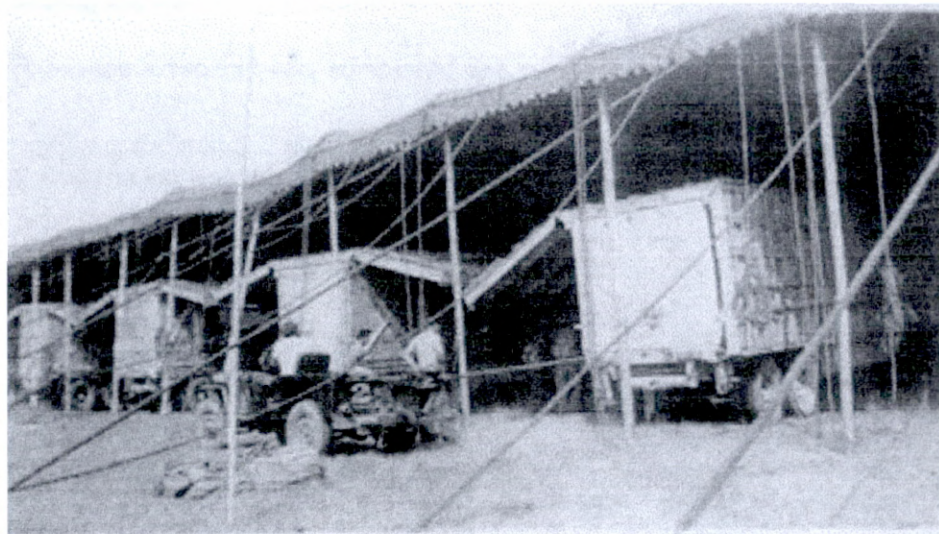
After over 50 years on the road Tommy came home to Gibsonton, Florida to his lovely modern home on Midway Street where he enjoys his retirement. He is constantly visited by performers who have worked with him in the past and enjoys "cutting up jackpots" with the best of them. Until recently he could be seen on his lawn tractor cutting his large lawn and caring for his flowers.

Tommy loves to have a hardy breakfast at the Show Town restaurant with his friend Clancy and retired aerialist Billy Rogers and on many evenings drives down to Apollo Beach for an ice cream treat at Dairy Queen. When fall comes and circuses return to the area he is always a back yard visitor and is still one of the most respected men in the circus business. Now eighty-two, Tommy Bentley has no regrets for leaving home in his teens to head down the sawdust trail.



Our first picture shows the Ringling-Barnum seat wagons, designed and manufactured under the direction of manager Art Concello, in 1950. These wagons have been expertly covered from every angle including Fred Pfening, Jr.'s fine article in *Bandwagon*, but that doesn't prevent me from making a few comments anyway. By the second wagon from the right is a jeep with a power take-off that is in the process of raising the sides. Once that was completed the front of the wagon was lowered to the floor making the pitch necessary to form a grandstand. The seats were already attached.

It would appear that the job was done at this point, but it was just beginning. In the front of each wagon were long adjustable braces, similar to those used today on the corners of RVs, to support the outer edges of the wagons. There were also blocks, stringers and platforms that created the seats reaching from the front of the wagon to the ground that had to be assembled. All in all, I don't think the show saved much time, but

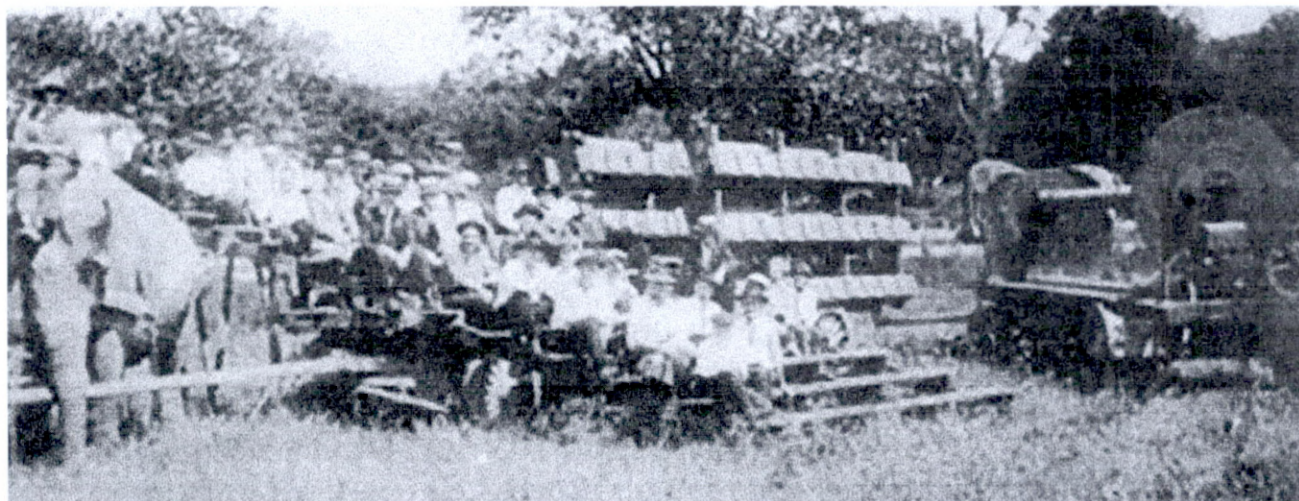


the wagons' redeeming quality lay in knowing that they would not fall down as I have seen some seats do.

Jimmy Keenan used to regale me with stories of when he was an usher with the old, pre-seat wagons, grandstand. Once the set up was done he would accumulate as many extra wooden chairs as possible and stash them wherever he could. With an overflow crowd they would prove invaluable. When approached by people looking for seats, Jimmy had

a stock answer, "Sorry, all seats are taken, only thing left are chairs being held in reserve in case Mrs. Edith Ringling and her party should arrive." One day a gentleman said, "My little girl has never seen a circus and I would gladly pay \$50 if you could find something." Jimmy quickly replied, "Sir, have a seat."

The new seat wagons of course eliminated this operation since all seats were bolted down. But not to be denied, Jimmy said they had



another wrinkle, but it took some acting ability. As the audience entered and took their seats, the ushers, when approached by people dissatisfied with General Admission seats, would reach for the customer's hand as though taking tickets, escort the party to a seat in the reserved section, then return later and said, "Two dollars, please." Concello got wind of this, and ended it by issuing ushers' uniforms with no pockets. The last time I saw the Ringling show under canvas was in 1955, and by that time they had Japanese showgirls as usherettes.

The next photo relates to the Concello seat wagons. Shown are the seat wagons from the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus in the early 1920s. They were designed and built by William "Cap" Curtis and were very similar to ones used today.

In this picture you can see Curtis' canvas spool wagon on the right. Both these innovations proved to be ahead of their time. The seat wagons were fine on a good lot, but in the mud they were hard to spot and tore up the show area. With a conventional arrangement, if the stringer and jack wagons could be spotted in the general vicinity of the big top the seats could be gillied in. By the time Concello built his seat wagons the show carried a fleet of Caterpillars.

In the case of the canvas spool, as you can see, the canvas wound on and off the vehicle from the side and had to be dragged back and forth every day, causing considerable damage to the canvas. The Wayne Sanguin Machine Shop in Hugo, Oklahoma built the first canvas truck where the spool was mounted from side to side whereby the vehicle moved to and from the canvas.

Luke Anderson once told me that he was with Floyd King the last year King Bros. Circus was out and one morning he was following the canvas spool when he noticed smoke coming from the canvas. He flashed his lights and the driver pulled over and stopped. Luke immediately tied some of the ropes from the tent to the front of his truck and had the other driver pull ahead, unloading half the big top along side the highway. Apparently they had rolled up the tent the night before with a lit cigarette inside. Luke said there were



holes burned through the canvas from one end to the other about ten feet apart.

The last photo is from the Ringling-Barnum Circus in 1952. That year, strange as it seems, Ringling didn't have performing elephants. Instead, John Ringling North decided to have an "Elephant Fashion Show," and being a New York socialite, he had many of the well known fashion designers come up with creations that show girls would wear while riding an elephant. Each designer's name appeared on the blanket of the elephant whose rider wore their handiwork.

North must have had a lot of fun with this while the show was in Madison Square Garden, but out in the hinterlands it died the death of a dog. Half way through the season he bought seven baby elephants and Louis Reed, assisted by Smokey Jones, did the training for the next year's center ring act.

This picture was taken in the elephant yard at the Sarasota winter quarters, so it must have been the unveiling. I don't know who the girl is and I can't make out the designer's name on the blanket. I wouldn't know who it was anyway, but the elephant is Ruth. Ringling had two elephants with that name and both

were outstanding. There was Big Ruth from the Al G. Barnes show and this Ruth, who was from Hagenbeck-Wallace.

When John Ringling bought the American Circus Corporation in 1929 the five circuses included in the deal carried in excess of 50 elephants. This Ruth was among the 12 elephants on the John Robinson Circus.

As the Great Depression started to whittle away at Ringling's empire the Robinson show was taken off the road after the 1930 tour. Ruth was among the elephants moved over to the Sells-Floto show where my dad worked. Sells-Floto met the same fate as John Robinson after the 1932 season, and Ruth now found herself with Cheerful Gardner on Hagenbeck-Wallace.

Hagenbeck-Wallace folded in 1938 and was stored in California. The next year while showing out West, Ruth was one of nine Hagenbeck-Wallace elephants picked up by the Ringling show, bringing its total to 46. She remained with the Big One for the next twenty years. Following the 1966 season Ruth and another old timer named Tribly were donated to the New Orleans Zoo where they finished out their days.

While we are on the subject of elephants I thought I'd share my answer to a recent question I received about what elephants eat. The short answer is basically hay and grain. When our three elephants were half grown I would order a ton of hay a week. I always said that oat hay was the best, but it was only available in California. For grain, my dad made a mixture of bran and oats every day with a handful of salt tossed in, but later I would feed a 50 pound bag of horse feed with apples and carrots added.

To be honest, I don't know how much an elephant drinks in a day. I watered mine all together out of a tub and when they stopped drinking I would wash them down. I hear that a big elephant can empty a 50 gallon drum; that sounds about right.

A New York Clipper Reporter with Ringling-Barnum in 1923

Introduction

In July 1923, Sime Silverman (1873-1933), the legendary founder of *Variety*, bought the moribund New York *Clipper*, the venerable show business weekly, then in its seventieth year. In its glory days under Frank Queen, who died in 1882, the *Clipper* reigned supreme in reporting on all forms of popular entertainment and sports, but gradually other publications superseded it. The *Sporting News* overtook it as the country's leading sports paper in the 1890s, and by the early 1900s *Billboard* and *Variety* supplanted the *Clipper* as the leading trade papers for both outdoor and indoor show business.

By 1923 the *Clipper* covered the theater, musicals, vaudeville, Broadway shows, and burlesque, none of them well or extensively. The outdoor news, such as it was, took about a page. The paper was clearly in decline, lacking

focus or a sense of mission. Its circulation was about 9200 copies a week and it carried little advertising.

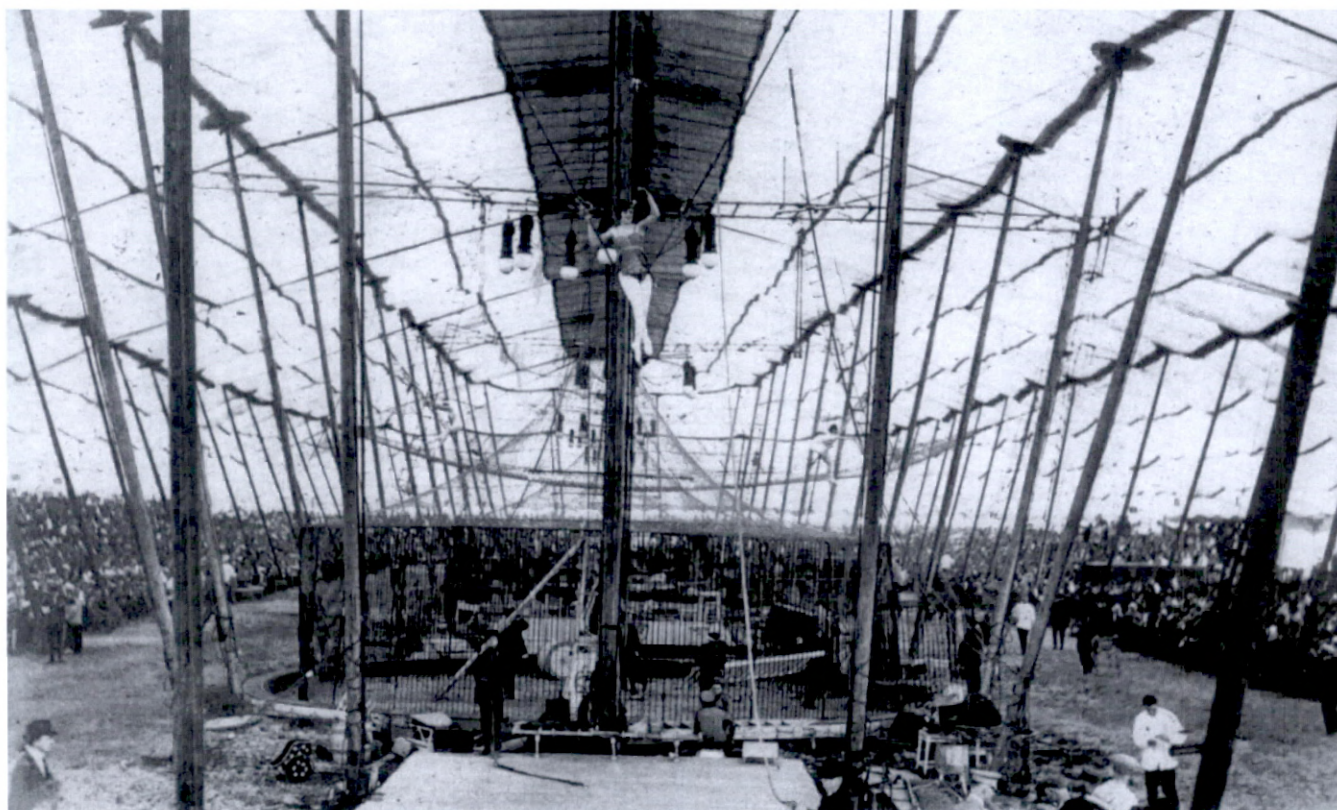
Silverman recast the *Clipper* into a book exclusively devoted to the outdoor amusement business. It was intended to compete with William H. Donaldson's *Billboard* in the outdoor field. Years earlier Silverman made *Variety* into the leading trade journal for the burgeoning movie industry, surpassing *Billboard* in both coverage and ad revenue. He therefore had reason to believe he could beat Donaldson again. *Variety* had carried circus news from the start, but it never challenged *Billboard*.

The revamped *Clipper*'s first issue was dated 20 July 1923. It had a completely different appearance. It was now flashier, had more in-depth

reporting, and contained more pages and more advertising. Circus news was expanded to a half dozen pages while other departments reported on carnivals, amusement parks, fairs, rodeos and horse racing, all of which were thoroughly covered. It was a terrific paper, full of information on the sawdust world. Besides carrying the usual reports from circuses, the new *Clipper* also published numerous feature articles of which the four that follow are representative.

Silverman fought it out with Donaldson for almost exactly a year. Shortly after buying the *Clipper* he increased circulation to 13,500, albeit with 2600 complimentary copies on the mailing list. He also lowered the price from fifteen cents to a dime. Alas, *Billboard* was too entrenched and the New York *Clipper*, the paper that informed, entertained, and

Inside the 1923 big top.



inspired generations of show people, died after the 12 July 1924 issue. It lasted seventy-one years. *Variety* immediately picked up the slack, noting on the cover of its 16 July 1924 edition: "News of the Outdoors and Music as formerly in *Clipper* will be found on pages 26-33 of this issue." *Variety* carried weekly circus news until at least 1930 and still occasionally reports on it. Fred D. Pfening III

A *Clipper* Staff Man Travels For One Week with the Ringling Show, *Clipper*, 20 July 1923, p. 3.

One of *Clipper's* New York men spent a week with the, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus, traveling from, Bridgeport, Conn., to Utica, N. Y. [June 30 to July 6] as a rather dazed and very unofficial observer. These are some of his random impressions, to be published weekly.

You couldn't approach an analysis of how they perform the daily miracle of moving between 1,200 and 1,300 people, feeding them, bedding them down and sending them along perhaps 100 miles to entertain, something like 25,000 people six times a week. It couldn't be done in a week's casual observation.

Variety's visitor merely rambled around the lot that looked like so much chaos until it began to take form and chatted about the train platform with these friendly, hard-working people. The sum total of his knowledge is still the same miracle it used to be when he was a kid and marveled at the Big Show's annual engagement at Madison Square Garden.

The technique of this enormous administrative job can't be grasped in a week, but one can get a hint here and there of what the wonderful



Tom Lynch, boss hostler.

organization means in its growth. A good part of the secret lies in the fact that, although the visible personnel of performers, workers and executives seems to shift and vary from year to year, there always remains a nucleus of old-timers that form the backbone of the organization.

"Old-Timers" Are Important

Pretty much all the men in important executive posts are generally classed as "old-timers." There are wagon drivers, those men who swing eighthorse teams up the street find through the intricate lanes between interlocking tent ropes and small forests of stakes, who have been at their jobs for 15 and 20 years.

Tom Burke, head of the five men who handle the small detail of get-

ting out and selling the program, has been at that job in various capacities for 29 years.

Tom Lynch, boss hostler has been riding a big saddle horse around the lot and snaking bogged down wagons to the freight yard on time for no less than 43 years.

So it goes through the whole crew. They grew up with the tops and they know their business with an indefinable instinct of subtlety that goes beyond reasoning. They have developed a sixth sense in the management of their specialty that gets things done.

They say that Chris Bell can tell in about 90 seconds after the crowd begins to surge in from the menagerie tent whether they're going to need the extra seats used only when there is a sell-out. Not because Bell has any powers of super-reasoning, but because he has been through the same routine so many times that a given situation around his little elevated stand registers automatically in his mind. He is just a type of the circus personnel—one of perhaps that block of a couple of hundred who form the backbone of the organization and make it function day after day in spite of any kind of unforeseen obstacles and handicap.

Circus Sense

It's an odd thing, this "circus sense," a sort of faculty of intelligence plus something else. Most men who spend years at a highly specialized job get it after a time. The writer has watched Wall Street ticker speculators who beat the game by reading the tape a few trades ahead, forecasting price movements half an hour before they happened. The same kind of faculty is sometimes found in operators of picture the-



The 1923 Ringling-Barnum midway.

atres.

The picture that's a success on Broadway or State street may be a thorough going flop on Market street, Philadelphia. But if any given exhibitor sees a picture anywhere he can tell by some kind of instinct whether it's going to be a success in his particular house. He has somehow absorbed a sense of a feeling of just what his particular audience likes and wants. In other words, constant contacts have made him a specialist in the tastes of the particular audiences.

All this to get at the point that the circus regulars are highly developed specialists; it is this ultra refinement of specialized intelligence that goes to make up a successful big top organization such as the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey outfit.

Marvelously Successful

And it is a marvelously successful enterprise. Coming out of Boston into Northern New York they had a lot of evil weather. The talk around the dressing tent was all of "poor house," "slim crowd" and all the time an examination of the stands showed scarcely a vacant seat. It was perfectly apparent from their attitude that they looked for continuous and consistent tent sell-outs and turnaways, and they were put out when it fell short of that.

Anybody even slightly acquainted with the show business and its loud boasts of accomplishment with small basis in fact couldn't escape the certainty that these people were accustomed to drawing full crowds and wouldn't be satisfied with less. The prosperity of the enterprise became a personal thing with every rough handed sledge swinger as much as with every glittering performer. If any body of people ever had the habit of success the circus people have it.

It is that attitude that has helped to make the Big Show a national institution.

The lure of the sawdust has been written to death for a couple of generations, but there's no escaping it. It seems to pull men back even unwillingly, almost like the relentless summons of printers' ink to the veteran reporter. It can't be merely the picturesqueness of the circus lot; it



Otto and his water wagon.

doesn't seem likely it is just the restless nomad life of the gypsy folk. It must be the satisfaction one gets in doing well the thing he knows best how to do—and there are men with the Big Tops who do things supremely well.

Take the matter of Otto and his decision to quit the show in Hartford. Otto was only a humble teamster. He drove the big water cart as big as a street sprinkler, and swinging out of the street and across a rough stony lot, he could swing his eight dappled grays as handsome as Kipling's gunner. Thirteen years Otto, swart and a bit unkempt, had followed the circus. But back in Bridgeport the other day, something got into Otto's head, principally, so it was rumored in the back lot talk, he had an offer of \$7 a day at a permanent job and it looked pretty good to Otto. He notified Mickey, his boss, that he was through. That was Saturday; he got his time and took his pay and to all intents and purposes Otto was free as the vagrant wind. But he was still saying good-bye to the folks in Hartford Tuesday.

He finally got around to the farewell to Lillian Leitzel, the star of the circus, who by virtue of that position occupies a tent all to herself just to the right or left of the back entrance, and before whose door the whole world passes four times a day.

"I'm leaving," Otto reported, shambling his feet and looking as uncomfortable as a schoolboy.

"Why, Otto you can't quit Mickey when we are short handed. What's the matter, have you had an argu-

ment with Mickey?"

No, Otto, hadn't a quarrel with Mickey or Mr. Warrell, but the work was too hard and he was going to settle down. By get-away time that night Otto had made the rounds of saying good-bye and he departed finally.

But about the first week in August or before Otto will get restless on the \$7 Bridgeport job and he'll somehow or other get to the show to shake the lines over those eight handsome dappled grays. Otto could no more desert those grays than he could live without food.

Can't Leave the Show

There are a hundred Ottos with the show. They get fits and starts and go into regular employment, but once the virus has got into their blood they can't rest comfortably at night without a switch engine in the next track of the freight yard blowing steam down their backs as they lie in their berths.

There hasn't been a time since the big war boom when unskilled labor has been so much in demand. Any man that can lift a hand can earn \$5 a day in almost any industrial town in America. But still the lack of unskilled labor is one of the least of the circus' troubles. They work harder on a circus lot than they would in any factory or construction gang, but something about the circus job holds them. One explanation is that the day's work is broken up. There is a stretch of about four hours of furious toil getting the top up and another spurt of work getting them stowed away. But nobody has to punch a time clock, and there is a break of gorgeous loafing in between.

Besides he is well fed and there is something of a lark about the proceedings; he's got his feet on the ground out in the open and there is always the appeal of adventuring around the next turn in the road. Who will say the circus working hand hasn't got it all over the clock-

punching herded up, eight hour factory hand? Certainly this gang of skylarking toilers, with their rough and tumble fun in the long turf of the back lot, as they strike the draught horse and cook house tents, seemed contented enough.

But a shortage among property men is a serious matter. The show has to move like clockwork, and one bungling groom or rigging handler can work more mischief and create more disorder than seven balky liberty horses. The show is rather short of property men going west, but they hope to fill up the complement when they get to Chicago, which is the center and heart of the outdoor show business.

450 Mile Jump

From Binghamton they were preparing for the long 450-mile leap into Pontiac, Michigan, beginning there a series of five stands into Chicago. Most of the performers regarded the prospect with satisfaction. A week stand means hotels with baths and a change from the regimen of the trains. Besides, there are still a lot of workers and performers from the old Ringling Bros. Show who regard Chicago as home.

The only fly in the ointment was the Sunday of travel that robbed them of their weekly day of rest and recreation. Nevertheless, they faced the hardship philosophically, the women planning provisions for the all-day journey and arranging exchanges of coffee for something and planning for picnicking during the three-hour halt for feed and watering the stock.

Clipper Man's Visit to Ringling-Barnum Circus, *Clipper*, 27 July 1923, p. 4.

Second chapter of a Clipper staff man's observations as guest of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum-Bailey circus for a week, while the show was moving through Connecticut and New



The Ringling-Barnum dining tent.

York.

The Clipper man caught up with the show late Saturday night in Bridgeport, but he didn't really join up (in circus parlance one is never "with the show." When Ollie Webb, czar of the dining tent and cook house, gives the arrival his official o.k. and designates a table, the new-comer is formally "on the show." This is a shibboleth that marks the elect)—until Sunday night in Waterbury.

The reason for the miscue was interesting. It seems some time back in the late winter a persuasive salesman from New Bedford or some other way point had argued the circus people into experimenting with a new canvas waterproofing process. It consisted of some intricate treatment that rubberized the top so that it was

like a Goodyear raincoat. If one put any confidence in the salesman who propositioned the show people on the merits of the process it would make a circus top twice as water-

proof as an automobile tire, which is half again as invulnerable to water as a Kentucky colonel.

The Raincoat Tent

Anyway, they took the process on and the 300-foot maintop and menagerie tent almost as big was given its rubber massage before they started out from winter quarters. While the circus played in Madison Square Garden the innovation proved all that was claimed for it, but by that time they left Boston they had been through several good downpours and Mr. Warrell's confidence was shaken. The bust happened in Fall River. It poured and poured and then some more. Mr. Warrell had wired to the president of the waterproofing company that all was not well and the president himself, by a bit of that miraculous poetic justice that makes life sometimes livable, happened to arrive on the Fall River lot just in time to get the full benefit of the climax.

The Ringling-Barnum lot in 1923.



The rubberizing process might be perfect for an auto or a golf cart, but spread over an acre or so of suspended canvas it wouldn't do. The canvas bagged along the ridge at the peak of the quarter poles and accumulated in puddles that could have accommodated the Poughkeepsie regatta. They gave a show, but it wasn't a truly enthusiastic performance. Mostly they were silent in enjoyment of the waterproofing president, who stood in the deluge with his coat collar turned up, just concentrating on being miserable. The man doesn't live who can alibi a waterproofing process with the rain coming through it.

The only thing lacking of perfection was that the inventor of the process was absent. So Mr. Warrell let it go by default and wired to New York for a half dozen van loads of wax (the reliable old paraffin that has waterproofed tents since Caesar invaded Gaul) to be delivered in Bridgeport Saturday. That was Thursday and the paraffin was on the spot according to specifications.

Old Stuff Best

The four sections of the circus train went on through on time to the next stand in Waterbury, but two cars were held back together with a detail of men. They spread the two tents on the Bridgeport lot and Sunday morning they went at the big job of waterproofing them in the old fashioned way. The wax is held in some solution, probably a second cousin to gasoline from the bouquet, and the mixture ladled out into watering cans. One set of workers sprinkled the flat canvas while another rubbed the stuff with brushes. They got it finished and the big top was dry enough to be dispatched to Waterbury late Sunday night in ample time to go up for the Monday matinee. The second half of the job, the menagerie top, was delayed, so they had to put up a side wall for the animal tent Monday, "corralled it" as the term is, and the regular top got back into use the following day in

Hartford. It was a sample of the sort of obstacles the organization is called upon to tackle, and they made it good as they always do. It was just as well they did for Tuesday in Hartford was a miserable day, long haul from the sidings to the lot, and they arrived in a young cloudburst. It rained until the top was nicely up and then stopped, but not until it was demonstrated that the paraffining job was the goods. Not a drop came through the wax treatment.



The general admission ticket wagon in 1923.

Everybody was as happy as could be expected after a morning of sloping about in a muddy ten-acre field hustling drainage work and the getting down of sawdust and straw against the 2 o'clock matinee.

It was a new lot, high and sloping and directly opposite Capitol park, more than two miles out from the center of the town with half a dozen trolley lines converging past in front of the marquee. To make it more difficult the back lot was covered with hip high tough grass and, although the public side of the lot was dry over half a foot of sawdust, the mud was plentiful away from the crowd.

Show on Time

In spite of all the difficulties the matinee was less than a quarter of an hour late. The circus people didn't think much of the afternoon house, although from the performers' entrance side it looked completely filled. It is a matter of comment this year that the \$1.50 seats sell first and

the cheaper "six-bits" seats at the ends are usually the empty ones. The same evening (it had cleared around noon and remained clear) the reserved seats stands were sold out by 7 o'clock. At that they needed the red blocks only at one end, that is, the left hand turn as the crowd enters through the extension.

The audience comes through the extension from the menagerie and turns along the hippodrome track toward the left because the right hand turn is fenced off. There's a reason for everything they do on the lot. The easing of the crowd to the left is a nice point of salesmanship. In order to get to the six-bit seats, which are the cheapest, you have to escort your girl past no less than four eloquent persons selling reserved seats and if the first six-bit section is filled you have to continue all the way around the track to the second. Meanwhile you can't help observing how much better a view one can get from the reserved seats. Anybody that can get all the way to the second bleachers must be either broke or hard boiled.

Want Best Seats

This matter of early sellout of high priced seats seems to indicate that the people are well supplied with spending money. Another indication of the same condition is that the side show of freaks (that's the only side issue except the program sellers and refreshment concessions) is doing more business this year than ever before. Nobody seems to be able to explain why, but the fact is evident according to Clyde Inglis, who manages the side show.

Perhaps the freak has been neglected so long that it is new again. The flood of all kinds of freak shows on Coney Island and in summer parks all over the country looks like testimony of a revival of the institution, although the Ringling-Barnum & Bailey show has carried the feature continuously except for the lapse of a year or two. In any event freaks are on a wave of popularity.

The makeup is about the same—colored jazz band, sword swallower, outlandish bushman and his wife (Mrs. Bushman does the heavy bally-hooing with gyrations and nightmare cries), giant and giantess and midgets. Zip isn't with us on the road. He goes back to Coney to work for Sam Gumpertz when the circus leaves the Garden. Zip has been so long in the business he's like a deluxe "Follies" chorus girl who can't endure the boredom of travel. Besides Zip is as homely as ever, but not so young as he used to be (There were nights of bumping trains and noisy engines when the Clipper man could see Zip's argument.).

Waterbury

In Waterbury they made their stand in the recreation park owned by the American Brass Co. and it was there the visitor made his contact with the organization. Mr. Warrell was still in Bridgeport struggling with the menagerie top, but Stewart Webb played host to the visitor. The boss of the chow is ex-officio hand-shaker in emergencies. The newcomer was made welcome at the "staff table," across the table and south by southwest from Mr. and Mrs. Fred Bradna, but not until after certain diplomatic complications.

Chris, the waiter, was not entirely satisfied. They had to meet circus discipline, which here frowns upon dining or breakfasting, as the case may be, without a coat. The visitor had on a golf jacket and although that golf jacket had been regarded with envy by half a dozen club secretaries in the metropolitan district and was absolutely the last word in sports attire from Mr. Spalding himself, Chris wasn't satisfied that it could be legally construed as a coat under the circus lot constitution and instructions received and duly noted. The deadlock was broken by a bright thought. Chris dug up a waiter's white duck coat that seemed to cover the case. It's a good rule at that.

Formality is a good thing for any group living to itself. That's why army officers out in the jungle shave before breakfast and dress for camp dinner. These are busy circus people when they are busy and conduct could easily drift into laxity.



Fred Bradna

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's electric Fans in Tent Ruined Concession 60%, *Clipper*, 3 August 1923, p. 6.

Further casual observations of a Clipper man who traveled for a week as a guest of the Ringling Brothers-Barnum-Bailey Circus.

The first breakfast under canvas was a pleasurable experience. The circus world apparently is a small community. It took only 10 words for the Clipper man to find that he and everybody else at the table had mutual friends in many show people. It appeared that everybody on the show knew everybody in the world intimately or remotely connected with the sawdust ring.

Mr. Bradna didn't appear for the meal, for the reason that he had gone fishing.

Bradna is said to have a regular circuit of favorite fishing spots laid out from April around New York to the closing stand somewhere south of Norfolk in October. This morning he got up early, motored 12 miles and returned before 10 o'clock with a string of pickerel and perch. If the show breaks into new territory, probably somebody in the advance force is charged with the specific duty of spying out the best fishing grounds.

Somebody is always charged with the business of looking up unexpected things. The show seems to have

something resembling a welfare department like a big industrial plant. In all the stands there was a notice posted at the entrance of the dressing-room tent giving explicit directions how everybody, men and women, could find good bathing grounds, the best way to reach the spot and the best time to be there. Getting there, giving a show and getting away ought to be an adult-sized job, but there are multitudes of other things that get attended to without fuss or bother. Once again the whole business is an intricate assemblage of small details, and each detail seems to be in the charge of some individual who stays in the background and only appears in the form of definite results. You don't have to ask directions. You just move ahead in a straight line and at exactly the right moment directions will be presented briefly and to the point.

The personnel finds its way about by some mystic sense of direction, like an Indian scout, but the lot offers difficulties to a newcomer. He has to be shown the way to the cook tent, for instance, and he gets about this when he inquires, "Past the dressing room to the pad room, then bear to the left."

Matter of Recreation

The matter of finding recreation takes on importance here, for the performers under the top have considerable leisure with the parade out, and a variation of the routine is a welcome break in the day. There is a division of opinion as to whether the parade will ever return to the Ringling-Barnum show. The property is so big now that it is none too flexible. It has worked up to 100 cars even with the parade paraphernalia left behind, and whether the parade stuff could be handled without cutting into the show is extremely doubtful. The problem is not, how can the plant be reduced, but rather scheming how to prevent the thing growing out of hand.

This year they have electric fans in the reserved seats, and that involves carrying that much more material. The improvement is worth the increase of weight and bulk of equipment, in the eyes of management, because it makes the people more comfortable, but where is the equip-

ment going to stop? Time was when flares served for illumination. Then came oil lamps and mantles for both general lights and spots. Now they carry a full electrical generating plant in two huge General Electric Co. dynamos driven by combustion engines and mounted on trucks with powerful incandescent lamps for the general illumination and arc lights for spots. Every improvement entails more men to take care of it and each improvement calls for another in an endless chain.

It isn't a simple calculation of profit or cost that counts. The electric fan innovation, for example, costs the show real money. Just for one item it has cut down the sale of palm leaf fans 60 per cent, and that concession is on the rocks. In a score of other directions circus paraphernalia is becoming more and more intricate. It might be possible to figure out a way to give a parade, but the point is that it might take away from the performance, and that is the paramount consideration.

The show now is too long by more than 20 minutes to the thinking of some men in the management. But they refuse to cut it for the reason that this business, old as it is and firmly established a national institution, never forgets that its first necessity is to build good-will with the public, and that means, as a prime requisite, giving a full measure of entertainment. The rule is hard and fast that it shall be a typical big top performance and side issues are rigidly turned down.

The night the show played Springfield, Mass., was the night of the Dempsey-Gibbons argument in Shelby, Montana, and everybody about the lot was feverishly interested in the outcome. So were the townsmen who came to see the show, pitched on the old fair grounds, 20 minutes away from the centre of the town and the bulletin boards. Around 10 o'clock all sorts of reports circulated. One of them was that Dempsey was knocked out in the second round.

Somebody suggested that bulletins be relayed from the local newspaper to the circus, but Mr. Warrell declined the proposal brusquely. "Show's too long now," he ruled. "We

have all the announcements we need as it is." Which is another way of saying that the circus lives to itself alone, pays its way on its merits and politically, economically and diplomatically is unalterably opposed to foreign entanglements.

Don't Know Town's Name

The same feeling seems to prevail among the performers. Half the time they are not quite sure what town they're playing, and unless they have pressing need for something that calls for shopping they don't go into town for weeks at a time. The town comes to them twice a day and that is enough. Their own pressing affairs suffice. There are innumerable details to be attended to mornings in the dressing and under the top. Rigging uses up a good deal of time, props some more and make-up and dressing still more. There is a gap between shows, but gossip, chores and visiting take care of that. Some of the acrobats use the time framing new stuff or teaching apprentices.

About this time Rudolph Matthies



Rudolph Matthies and his tigers.

was thrillingly engaged between shows in breaking in a raw tiger in the arena cage over the right hand ring. He lost one of his beasts in Boston and had to take on another in mid-season. The task should have been the business of a whole winter, but the road knows no "Can't-be-done," so the tall, serious young trainer went at it between shows.

The brute was full of nerves and evil temper facing this strange figure in top boots and a sweat shirt, and sullenly declined to learn its maneuvers. Hour after hour, with all the distractions of noise outside and the circus people moving about close to the bars, Matthies patiently urged and coaxed the sullen cat from 5 to night show time, the only time the

arena cage was available for the purpose. He was confident he would have the tiger working in Chicago ten days hence, although the slinking brute, snarling over its shoulders as it slipped about like a shadow, seemed to contradict.

Down at the opposite end a group of acrobats were using the platform, breaking in a youngster to pedal juggling and perch work, going over the same thing with monotonous persistence. No wonder they can sleep against the noise of the bumping train. And they do sleep the sleep of the just. They tell of one child apprentice who fell out of an upper berth into the aisle of the sleeper and was gathered up by his father and boosted back without waking up.

Ringling-Barnum Show Better Entertainment with Parade Eliminated, *Clipper*, 10 August 1923, p. 6.

Fourth in series of comments and observations made by a Clipper staff man who traveled a week with the Ringling-Barnum-Bailey Circus before it headed out of Eastern territory.

Irrespective of the possibility of adding parade paraphernalia to the already enormous equipment carried by the Big Show, there is plenty of argument on the side of no parade tending to show that

the organization can give a better performance with that feature eliminated. The confusion and jam to get the pageant downtown when the arrival has been delayed is avoided and the performers are always in physical condition to be on edge for the best performance in their power.

This means a good deal. The spirit is the most difficult thing to gauge and weigh, but it is the great invisible element that gets over to the audience. A crisp, snappy show is of paramount importance and a six-mile parade in the blazing sun is not the best preparation for a strenuous matinee. A leisurely morning has the effect of getting everybody on edge for the afternoon show, which comes as a welcome break in what could grow to be monotonous routine. After all, the show's the thing and the

absence of parade has the effect of making everybody concentrate on the ring and platform, where they all make their appeal to the public instead of the sometimes irksome contact with the community in the streets.

It is an open question whether the added detachment of show from people due to the absence of parade does not heighten the public interest in the big tops. The big illusion of the sawdust ring may be intensified by its remoteness. The public sees the gaudy colored cars arrive and the animals tramp through the streets, but sees little of the performers until they dash sparkling into the arena. The big show is at that status of an institution where it doesn't need a ballyhoo to call the attention of the townsmen to its presence and the elimination of the street spectacle may be shrewd showmanship.

Fine Horseflesh

In one particular it works out extremely well. The draught stock of the Big Show is an attraction all in itself. It would be hard to find as fine a display of horseflesh anywhere outside of the pampered breeds of horse show stock, as the exhibit back in the horse tents. They are about half and half of bays and dappled grays, plump, sleek and with that lumbering grace of movement that goes with a big boned horse. They hook them up in sixes and eights, and nothing in the ring or track is handsomer than their swinging stride as they amble from train yard to lot, checked high and groomed like pet ponies.

In former days it was generally done to keep the stock in condition. First there was frequently a three-mile double haul, hasty feeding, a hot pull through the town, then a short rest and the haul back. Now, with the morning's work over, they are well stabled in the big horse tents until late afternoon, when the horse tents, cook house tents and dining tents are struck and hauled to the first section or "flying squadron," which is away before the performance is over, so that the cook house and dining tent for the crew may be



Merle Evans and his big show band.

up at the next stand by 3 o'clock the following morning. The workmen must be fed tomorrow around 6 o'clock.

Auto Made Changes

They say that increased automobile traffic practically prohibits parades, since no modern town can stand having its principal streets closed to motor vehicles for long stretches. Whether that is true or not the automobile has certainly worked some changes in circus methods. For one thing the old institution of the "excursion agent" has disappeared. Time was when it was an important factor. He worked from headquarters and searched out trolley and steam railroad routes for the country surrounding each stand. Sometimes they made a low excursion rate from 100 miles away, the rate including admission to the show. One circus man recalls that one of the longest excursion runs was up in Maine, when the railroad made a rate of less than \$5 for a run of 210 miles each way, including admission to the show--the Buffalo Bill Wild West in this case.

Now there is no excursion because there are so many auto owners in the semi-urban territory surrounding the principal cities. it wouldn't pay the roads or the circus. Instead they have to pick lots where there is plenty of parking space. This is another of the conditions moving circuses further and further from the town centers. Enterprising local impresarios generally stake out the desirable spaces near the lot and charge 25 cents for parking. The cars overflow even this large space and for blocks around the show place private owners who have not cared to give the use of their property, but cannot keep the invasion off, placard their grounds with signs warning that they assume no liability for what happens

to cars left there without permission.

Hard Working Musicians

The no-parade idea works out especially well for the band. It would appear that without a parade it would be pretty soft for Merle Evans' bandsmen, whose labors are thus reduced to two sessions of about two hours or so each. But there is probably no harder working department of the show than these same musicians. They do not set up a musical program for the whole season and follow it to the end of the trip. That would, of course, be the easiest way, but the easiest way is seldom the best with a circus. The discipline of the band, one of the special hobbies of the Ringlings themselves, is a significant sidelight on circus life. These musicians change their entire program about once in four weeks.

The repetition of a set program becomes mechanical after a very short time and monotony saps enthusiasm. Everybody around this top has to live at concert pitch all the time and there is no room for an individual with a lazy bone. Mr. Evans combs the catalogs of the world for suitable music, and suitable music for his purposes is a complicated order. It has to meet two principal requirements; it must be good music and must be good circus music, two distinct elements if you please.

The bandmaster has a great friend and ally in Lou Graham, former side show manager and ringmaster, and now overseer of the show. Graham has an instinct for circus music and from his seat just to the left of Evans he is his able co-worker and sincere critic. In Springfield Evans had several new selections and before he had them played he leaned over and called Graham's attention to the new material. One got the quick approval of the announcer. It was a spirited march number arranged especially for the display then on. The other was a current ballad with a rather loose waltz movement. The title was something like "Forget Me, Darling." Graham made a grimace of dislike and observed crisply, "Good advice to take."

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EDWARD SHIPP
OWNER AND MANAGER

Grand Rapids Mich. Jan 21st 1905

Forepaugh and Sells Bros
Columbus O.

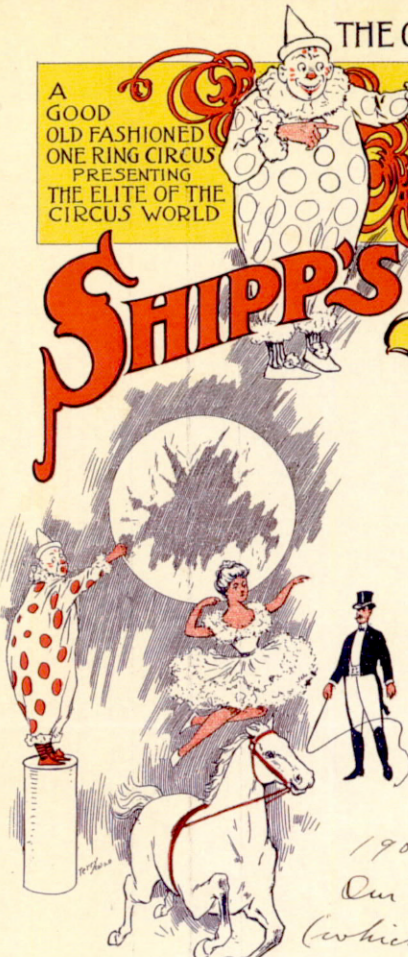
Dear Sir:

Mr Al Ringling has requested me to state our lowest salary for season 1905

Our salary season 1904 was \$20.00 (which the books will show) which is our lowest salary for the coming season. We have the same two horses used in my Wifes act the past season.

Yours truly
Edward Shipp

South Bend Ind. Week Jan 23rd
To New Oliver Opera House



Edward Shipp was equestrian director on the Forepaugh-Sells Circus in 1905. In this letter he asks about the salary for 1906. Shipp produced an indoor show that used this letterhead. He later was co-owner of the Shipp and Feltus show that toured South America.



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